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IT'S A WAY THEY HAVE
IN THE ARMY

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IT'S A WAY THEY HAVE IN THE ARMY

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"THE OUTCAST EMPEROR," "HIS EMINENCE," "THE PROVINCIALS," ETC.



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**DEDICATED
TO
THE ADJUTANT**

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THIS book does not claim to be anything but a faithful transcription of conversations heard and incidents witnessed by the writer.

IT'S A WAY THEY HAVE IN THE ARMY

CHAPTER I

THE Wharfedale district of Yorkshire is the most beautiful part of England, and the choicest piece of it lies round Heribert Abbey. The colouring of the country is deep and vivid. The house shows a low, apparently interminable stretch of wall, grey and crumbling-looking, clothed with creepers. The vivid red of Virginian creeper contrasts with the dull dark green of ivy, and under and between them both the greyness of the stone shows like the background of a neutral-tinted wall between brilliant water-colour pictures. Below a narrow grey-battlemented terrace lies a typical old English garden of cut yew hedges and bright flower borders. Close round the house cluster woods, the finest oaks and beeches of a countryside, pressing protectively round the old grey walls. On one side of the

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house a river cleaves its sinuous way through the woods like a shimmering serpent. Below the garden are the slopes of the park. Above the woods the land rises gradually to the upward sweep of the moors.

The house stands high, in spite of being thus dominated. It commands the valley below, with its river running the whole length as far as the eye reaches, with the thick massing of woods clothing it, and beyond the faint ridge of more dim moors. A very fair domain and very peaceful ; yea, it is a goodly heritage. Lord Ewe can stand on his battlemented terrace and see nothing save what is his own. All he can hear is his own, too ; the whispering of his river, the "cuc-cuc-cuc" of his startled pheasants from the woods, the bleat of his fallow deer from the park, the hoarse call of his grouse from the moors. He is the finest thing on earth—a great landowner ; he has all the advantages and none of the disadvantages of sovereignty, and he is worthy of the men who go before him.

There is something ruggedly grand about the great barons of the Middle Ages. Realistic writers may tell us if they like that they were very uncivilised. Very likely they were ; but there is nothing very beautiful about civilisation. It is apt to be pettifogging and belittling. The

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men of yore had great simple virtues and primitive vices. They did not fritter away their time in thousands of petty occupations. They were rather like big dogs which, when they are hunting and fighting, hunt and fight hard, and when they are not, lie down and go to sleep. No doubt they were not better than their descendants, and in some ways they were certainly less decorous ; but I refuse to believe that they were much worse, and that what code we have of honour, what sense we have of beauty and purity, what reality we have of religion, does not come straight from them. On the whole, they were good autocrats, and those that reign in their stead have little reason to be ashamed of them.

Lord Ewe was the best product of a long line of honourable gentlemen. He never wavered a quarter of an inch from his own very high standard of honour and duty. His experience was narrow, but his sympathy was wide. He had the tolerance rather of the saint than of the man of the world, though he had not a shade of asceticism in him, but loved the good things he had possessed all his life. He understood something of human nature, though his life had shown him little of its variations. He was very near nature himself, a simple-hearted man who could see and disapprove of black and see and encourage

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white, but was quite unconscious of the existence of grey. Not by any means an intellectual man, he was yet not in the least uncultivated, and those who sneer at "the brainless and effete aristocracy" were usually made to feel rather small and silly in his presence. Six feet in his socks, he could outwalk even his gamekeepers and beaters, who were presumably inured to hardship by being out in all weathers, and he had never had an hour's illness since his first half at Eton was disturbed by measles. He ruled his kingdom himself, and ruled it very well too, being a sound man of solid ability and clear head. He was a pillar of law and order, and when he opened his mouth to speak, which he did concisely and well, there were not many who were foolish enough to act the part of a deaf adder. He succeeded as a child to his inheritance, and yet there had never been a word to say against his life.

Fortunately for England, the House of Lords is full of a great many more men of this stamp than of the bad subjects so common in novels.

On a particularly beautiful night in the early days of August, 1901, the drawing-room windows of Heribert Abbey were open on to the terrace, letting in the balmy scents of the garden. The battlements of the terrace stood out in clear silhouette against a benignant August moonlight.

There was nothing to be seen of colour outside, only the whiteness of the light and the blackness of the dark. Inside the windows the rose-shaded electric lights beamed on a room full of warmth and colour. On a sofa, under a Vandyck portrait, sat Lady Betty reading a book, while she absently stirred the coffee in the cup standing on a little Sheraton table at her elbow. Outside, leaning against the battlements and looking into the clustering darkness of the yew-bordered garden, stood Lady Blanche, listening to a story she had read a great many times, but had never heard *vivâ voce* before.

Lady Betty was alone, but Lady Blanche had a companion.

This was reversing the order of things, for Lady Betty was of a gregarious nature. She was understood to be the frivolous one. She always danced every dance, and had a procession of young men following her as if she were the cross-bearer in a church, and they were the choir and the clergy. She could easily have stayed in three hundred and sixty-five houses in the year if she had wanted to. And it was not only the glamour of an heiress which drew all men after her.

Lady Blanche, on the contrary, was supposed to be serious and to have ambitions. The origin of this reputation is lost among the dowagers who sit

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in rows on benches round the London ballrooms and solace their fatigue, discomfort, and hunger by taking away the characters of each other's daughters. Lady X., "la fine fleur" of the very smartest set, is well known for her caustic exordiums on the manners of the rising generation, her two daughters being equally well known as the young women in all London who least exhibit "that repose which marks the caste of Vere de Vere."

The dear old Duchess of Y., who looks like a woolly old sheep, bleats out that "girls are not so lively as they were in her day. She notices a distinct hardening in their expressions every year."

Lady A. Z., the mildest adjective to describe whose youth is "gay," counts up how many times the Ladies Y. or the younger Miss X. dance with the same young man (the elder Miss X. has been out long enough to learn that what her mamma does not see there will be no scenes later to grieve for, and never comes near the ballroom), and makes deductions.

It was these critics who decided that Lady Blanche FitzAlan, youngest daughter and co-heiress (as the heralds would say) of Lord Ewe, of Heribert Abbey, was "serious." Lady Blanche never gave them any foundations for their verdict

beyond being a better listener than talker, and having big inscrutable brown eyes. Men did not find her as attractive as Lady Betty. Yet Lady Blanche, had they but known it, was the more malleable. Those big upstanding women often are. The fairies can look after themselves; they are a shrewd, long-headed little people. But a big woman—and a big man too—has a big heart oftener than a big understanding.

“Doesn't it seem like fate?” remarked Captain Charlesworth, of the 27th Lancers. “Six months ago there I was fighting the Boers, and there were you dancing away in London, and neither of us had ever heard of each other.”

Now there was no profundity in this, because it stands to reason that unless two people are brought up together there must necessarily be some period when they are ignorant of each other's existence. But Blanche FitzAlan, under an August moon on Heribert Terrace, was much struck by the originality of his words.

“It does seem like fate,” she echoed.

“I cursed so when I was invalided home,” went on Charlesworth. “If I had only known!”

“Would you still have cursed?” asked Lady Blanche, with a secure smile.

“How can you ask?”

Lady Betty, inside the room, crossed one foot

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over the other and wondered what affianced lovers found to talk about that seemed to require such lengthy *têtes-à-tête*.

"You'll like India," said Captain Charlesworth, a few moments later. "All ladies like India."

"Do they? Why?"

Captain Charlesworth, questioned point-blank, did not know why.

"There's lots to do," he replied feebly.

"More than in this country?" asked his lady love.

"I suppose so—yes."

"Oh, Bertie!" and the diminutive came very prettily from her unaccustomed lips. "I don't think that will suit me at all, for you know I really never have time for anything here."

"I suppose," remarked Charlesworth vaguely, "ladies can always make occupations for themselves. I never can kill time when I am on leave."

"My father," said Lady Blanche, "has always a great deal to do."

Captain Charlesworth had recovered from wounds inflicted by the enemies of his country almost entirely in the society of Lord Ewe's daughters. He had seen Lord Ewe daily at breakfast and dinner, but not invariably at any other meal, and was not an authority on Lord Ewe's occupations.

Privately he believed that all civilians ate the lotus.

"I should like to see the world," said Lady Blanche, in her pensive way. "Betty has always been the traveller of us two. I have only been abroad twice—once to Rome and once to the Riviera."

"I am thankful to say that I have done nearly all my soldiering abroad," remarked Bertram. "The regiment went to India soon after I joined, and then there was the war."

"The war is not over yet," she remarked.

"The worst of it is," he prophesied.

Lady Blanche became more serious than ever. She was going to be a soldier's wife, and it had never struck her before. She had fallen in love with the man, and being totally ignorant, poor soul, of what is meant by the Army, never dreamt that the fact of his being in it would in any way affect her life. Even now, as she first realised something of what is meant by being a soldier's wife, she did not in the least grasp it all. If she had, this story would never have been written.

To the women who have neither husband nor lover in the Army—that is, in spite of the many men who went to the South African War, the majority of women—war is a luxurious emotion. So it had been to Lady Blanche for two years.

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But now she suddenly realised that between herself and that August night, and herself of six months before, when she did not know that Bertram Charlesworth existed, there was the difference between the gambler who has only got on a stake out of his abundance, and the gambler who has staked his all.

"They can't send you back to the front, can they?" she asked rather suddenly.

"I can't get back," he said rather ruefully. "You see, my regiment was one of the first to go out. It went from India, and they've sent it back again."

"They won't be fighting in India just yet?" she inquired hopefully.

"There's always the chance of it," he returned.

Of course it was quite characteristic that war should mean to him certain medals and problematical D.S.O.'s and V.C.'s. It was equally natural to her war meant agonies that no glory could mitigate. While the war was going on no one dared to say, even backed up by Solomon's opinion, "Better a live dog than a dead lion"; but how many women thought it?

"My aunt Philippa is coming here to-morrow to make your acquaintance," Blanche murmured a little later. "She has a son in the Guards, you know."

"Oh, has she?" returned Bertram without enthusiasm. He was not up in his Peerage, and did not know.

"You have no relations, have you?" she went on to ask.

"Not a soul," he returned breezily. "I never felt the want of them though. Judging by the way most people get on with their parents, I think it is a fallacy that orphans are to be pitied."

"It will make your side of the church very empty," said Lady Blanche, and laughed for pure joy at the prospect of that ceremony, when her acquaintance should stare at and criticise his across an aisle.

Bertram Charlesworth wanted to say that no wedding chime, welcome though it would be, could equal for sweetness the cadences of her laugh, and he made a very gallant effort to put this sentiment into fitting language. Unfortunately he was so unpractised as a phrase-maker, and in fact so ignorant that there was an art of phrase-making to be learnt by rote just like any other A B C, that only a very garbled version of his thought reached Lady Blanche.

She was quite satisfied though; in those days she was easily satisfied.

Lady Betty, playing "The Demon" at a Sheraton card-table, looked up, from her sixth unsuccessful

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ful attempt, at the clock, and saw that it was on the point of striking eleven. Lord Ewe, roused from some estate accounts by the striking of his slightly fast "grandfather," pulled down the roll-top of his desk and left his study for the drawing-room. Engaged people do not notice hours except to reflect that there are only twelve in the day, and that there ought to be twenty-four.

"Time little kittens were in bed," remarked Lord Ewe, in pursuance of a time-honoured joke of the kind which obtains in families, and is so seldom characterised by anything which could be described as wit.

"I have come to the conclusion," returned Lady Betty gravely, "that the prisoners in Pretoria who beguiled their time in playing 'The Demon,' and declared that at last they got to playing it so often that they made it come right five times out of six, were either liars or cheats."

"What a tragic opinion to hold of our brave defenders!" remarked Lord Ewe mildly. "And, apropos, where are Blanche and Bertie?"

"I do hope that Blanche remembers," said Lady Betty irrelevantly, "that Aunt Philippa cannot live without her rubber of bridge. But perhaps there won't be a moon to-morrow night. Is the moon going down?"

"The glass isn't, if that is what you mean," answered Lord Ewe, who was never superior. "And it is a full moon."

"I shall send for the Vicar. I won't spoil their pleasure. It won't last. Nothing good does last," said Lady Betty with youthful cynicism.

"Sometimes it changes into something better," said the family philosopher, and threw up the windows with more noise than was necessary. Lord Ewe was blessed with a long memory.

This indeed was the secret of all his success. He never forgot to consider other people's feelings; above all, he never forgot that there had been periods in his life when his own feelings differed from what they had become in course of time. Few men of middle age can recall the "long, long thoughts" of their youth. The consequence is that the middle-aged and the old usually make a hopeless hash of their dealings with the young.

The course of true love seldom runs smooth, because the elder generation takes care that it shan't.

But Lord Ewe was a great deal too wise to emulate his contemporaries. He remembered his own marriage. So he took care that his own daughter's should be unhindered. Bertram Charlesworth had something besides his pay, a

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something Lord Ewe saw no reason to declare ample for them both. The only question he thought proper to ask, and that very mildly, was whether his future son-in-law meant to leave the Army on his marriage.

His future son-in-law, with a stare, said "Certainly not," and the intelligent Lord Ewe said nothing more. Other people, however, said a great deal more, not being intelligent except in their own opinion. Lady Philippa de la Herne, the aunt who came to make her future nephew's acquaintance, opened the attack.

"Of course you will send in your papers," said she. The possession of a Guardsman son primed her with this technical expression which she brought out with a flourish.

"Why?" asked Bertram.

"Why not?" retorted Lady Philippa.

They were at an instant deadlock.

"I am a very keen soldier," explained Bertram.

"I daresay you have been up to now. But now things are changed," said Lady Philippa.

"I can't see it," returned her future nephew.

"But, my dear man," expostulated Lady Philippa, "what do you expect to gain by sticking to the Army?"

"I hope to command my regiment," said Bertram.

"But that won't be for years and years," exclaimed Lady Philippa.

"Of course not. I'm only a junior captain," replied Bertram.

"And what are you going to do with poor Blanche all that time?"

"I don't understand you," said Bertram bewildered.

Lady Philippa suddenly mounted the high horse of middle-age.

"People nowadays," she proclaimed, "have a very different idea of married life to what was thought nice in *my* time. When *I* was young people were supposed to marry and settle down."

"Now they marry and somebody has to settle up—is that it?" asked Bertram, reduced to feeble facetiousness.

Lady Philippa conceived the lowest opinion of his intellect. As far as understanding her was concerned she was quite right. He had not the foggiest notion what she was talking about.

"My poor child," she said to Lady Blanche, "I am afraid you will have a very poor sort of married life."

Lady Blanche was amazed at this novel form of congratulation.

"I think Ewe ought to put a stop to it," was

Lady Philippa's next remark. "Or else you should insist on the young man exchanging into the Blues."

"Why the Blues?" inquired Lord Ewe.

"Oh, because they are so nice and peaceful."

"Hardly their reputation, is it?" insinuated Lord Ewe gently.

"Don't be ridiculous, Ewe, you know what I mean. They always stay quietly in England. Why, do you suppose Blanche is going to follow the drum?"

"I do so suppose," replied Lord Ewe equably.

"And where is the drum—tell me that?"

"I understand it is in India," replied Lord Ewe.

"I understand that too," returned Lady Philippa triumphantly. "I asked Phil" (the famous Guardsman). "And do you think Blanche will be able to stand India—a horrid country, full of the most dreadful insects? After this place, too!"

"There are insects here, especially down by the river," murmured Lord Ewe.

Lady Philippa spoke next to Lady Betty.

"I call this a very mad scheme of Blanche's to go to India," she asserted.

"Why?" inquired Lady Betty. "I daresay she will be amused. India is a beautiful country, I have always heard."

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Now the only landscape which appealed to Lady Philippa's sense of the beautiful was Bond Street.

"It will be so fearfully dull for the poor child," she said. "Not a soul one knows there."

"There's Lord Curzon. He's very nice," hazarded Betty.

Lady Philippa gave her niece a large old-fashioned ornament of pink topazes as a wedding present.

"I hope, my dear, you may never regret it," were her mysterious words as she made the presentation.

"Of course, it is no use to give the poor child silver," she remarked to the rest of the relations when she met them in London just before the wedding in October. "I don't suppose black servants would know how to clean it; and of course anything valuable would be stolen. It really makes it very awkward to decide what to give her."

Lady Philippa, meanwhile, insisted on being consulted about all the arrangements for the wedding. Her eagerness might be maliciously interpreted, for she had three daughters out for whom she could not find husbands. Nobody seemed to have any desire even to take them to

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India. Lady Philippa was evidently not coveted as a mother-in-law.

Sir Reginald de la Herne, Lady Philippa's husband, reigned supreme in an island off the South Coast. He was usually alone in his glory there, and his chief occupation was growing daffodils. When he came to the mainland he comported himself in an obsolete manner, and was hurried back again by his fond family.

Wedding presents began to come in about the end of August and continued in a steady but not copious stream till the happy day, under six weeks later. There seems to be an unwritten law concerning the giving of wedding presents. Their value and beauty appears to vary with the splendour and appropriateness of the marriage. The bride of a millionaire or a peer of the realm possessing historic family jewels receives gems of purest ray serene and otherwise from every acquaintance she has in the world. The bride of the poor man, or the man who for some reason or other is without heirlooms, probably does not even get the inevitable tiara. The bride-elect will do well to remember the ninth beatitude about "he who expecteth nothing," for those who seem designed by nature to be cheerful givers generally prove disappointing. The gifts of the rich are

almost always remarkable for their inadequacy. If it were not that the reverse holds good, it would be an even drearier world than it is. But though the rich seldom, if ever, possess the virtues which would be easiest of attainment to them, such as generosity and unselfishness, the poor shine by contrast.

It is a mistake to do a thing at all unless you do it well. When it comes to wedding presents it is better to give nothing at all than to give something that will make people say you are shabby. But I believe the rich rather enjoy being thought shabby. They certainly enjoy being thought poor.

They do not, however, enjoy being treated as if they were poor, given the second best of everything, and sent down to dinner with the governess as the most inferior guest. Unfortunately for the improvement of their manners, few people have the moral courage to treat them thus.

Lady Blanche had always been overshadowed by her sister, though she was not aware of it. The consequence was that she did not receive the very imposing presents which are listed every week in the *Court Journal* for all who run to read. Lord Ewe understood the art of advertisement imperfectly, and no one would ever have found it

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possible to convince him or his daughters of its necessity in these hurrying times.

Alas, one has to be very rich and very great—in which case it is generally done for one—or very poor and very obscure to be able to do without advertisement nowadays. The theory is not pretty (little is that comes from America, except the women): but suppose there is no other way of attaining the pinnacle on which alone one can dare to be obscure?

Now dear Lady Blanche was not at all the sort of person to count up her wedding presents and draw deductions from their quantity and quality. She thought it “very kind” of anybody to give her anything at all. She was seeing the whole world in a roseate glow just then, and the very commonplace actions of her acquaintance and kinsfolk were glorified therein. This was lucky for the acquaintance and kinsfolk, and above all lucky for Captain Bertram Charlesworth.

Luck, however, is a god whose presence is never recognised until he is gone, as the profound Irishman remarked.

I would like to have *Court Circular* language at my command to describe the wedding, because it is so exquisite. The “fashionable wedding supplement” reads like an idyll which brings tears to

the eyes. The brides always look "handsome," or at least "charming," before the ceremony, and "radiant" after it ; and there is something especially touching in the "bevy" of beautiful young creatures who follow her up the aisle (each, of course, hoping it may be the last time that she will have to play second fiddle instead of first at a wedding, and wishing that it were true that one marriage always leads to others). The bride "leans on the arm of her father," she never drags him up the aisle out of step ; and the bridegroom "makes his responses in a manly voice," but does not mumble them haltingly after the clergyman. Then the organist always "executes" some hackneyed march "brilliantly," and so he should, for he has so much practice, and the choir dramatically chant "Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war," or "How welcome was the call." It all sounds so very beautiful.

Probably there was an account exactly like this in the papers after Lady Blanche exchanged the name of FitzAlan for that of Charlesworth. But it is so wrong to begin a novel with wedding chimes instead of ending it that way that we will leave all that out.

To the hero and heroine, or the victims, as you will prefer to call them if you affect cheap humour,

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a wedding seldom appears anything but a whirl of utter confusion. But they generally feel they are taking so mighty a plunge into the unknown that it does not matter if everything is left at a loose end behind them. The prominence of new clothes, new trunks, new jewellery, and a new name, and the comparative relegation to the background of the personality of the bridegroom, make at least one of the reasons why so many women find marriage a failure, and it is by the purest luck that more do not find it—so lightly and unadvisedly do they take it in hand.

Lady Blanche was not less thoughtful than other girls, but she went forth into the storm of rice and old slippers in a benighted unconsciousness of all that was before her. It is a spirit worthy of Columbus or any other ancient explorer, but women are not as a rule aware of their own bravery. She certainly was not.

“And now they’re going to live happily ever after,” remarked one optimistic bridesmaid to Lady Betty as they stood on the doorstep of Lord Ewe’s London house looking after the departing carriage, which looked as if it had been through a particularly virulent hailstorm, and regardless of the crowd of servant-girls and small boys pressing up to the support of the awning and encroaching on the sacred red cloth.

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"I wish I could say as much for myself," said Lady Betty, suddenly feeling the weight of life.

"Oh, you'll soon follow suit," returned the bridesmaid, privately thinking her cousin quite indecent to aspire thus openly after married bliss.

"That won't give me Blanche back again," said Lady Betty, going back into the house.

CHAPTER II

THE Mediterranean was so unwontedly smooth during the passage of the P. and O. steamer *Oasis* from Marseilles to Port Said, that even the worst sailor failed to succumb. Rows of deck chairs sprawled along the deck, with their occupants pretending to read, but really staring inquisitively at the more active passengers who walked up and down, sacrificing their naturally retiring dispositions to their physical well-being. Of course, everyone on board, with a possible exception of Lady Blanche Charlesworth, had pored over the passengers' list till they got it by heart, and the more obscure mentioned in that mystic document were seeking opportunity to introduce themselves to the better known. The desire to know somebody who does not want to know you springs eternal in the traveller's breast.

The secret aspiration of everybody was to know Lady Blanche Charlesworth. To begin with, she was the only "lady of title" on board, and the great British public would rather grovel at the

feet of a medical knight's widow than be on equal terms with Mrs. "Jacky" Doncaster or Mrs. "Willie" Goodwood, those stars of the "Smart Set," who value themselves and are valued by a small fatuous circle at a value far transcending that of the blood of a thousand kings. Next, Lady Blanche was a bride; and next to a lord, the great British public loves a bride.

Of course there are brides and brides. An American heiress who has captured her Duke, or a dowager Countess who has eloped with her footman, is a far more "interesting" bride than a young woman who has merely mated with an equal. But failing a "romantic" bride, any bride will do.

Most of the passengers on the boat were going to India, though a few were bound for Cairo. The latter may possibly have been going for pleasure, but the former only because they were obliged. They were mostly soldiers' wives, and they alternated between being great friends and deadly enemies all the way out.

There was, of course, the usual lady whose whole soul was centred on an ambition to sit next the captain, and who in attainment of this object displayed a power of intrigue such as *les maîtresses en titre* of French kings would not have despised.

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There was also the well-known spinster who was convinced that the captain must have known her aunt, that venerable lady having once in the dark ages made a short voyage in that particular ship. It was touching to observe the profound faith this lady had in the commanding personality of her relative, which she supposed to be capable of stamping itself indelibly on the recollection of a man who had made some hundreds of voyages with some thousands of different passengers every time.

There was also the unavoidable missionary, travelling first class at the expense of the heathen or of their would-be converters, it was not quite clear which, and anxious to get up prayer meetings and thump out very depressing airs on that least musical of all instruments—the harmonium—on all occasions. There were two Roman Catholic nursing sisters, but they were in the second class, and prayed in their own cabins secretly.

There were several very odious Anglo-Indian children, who had unhealthy complexions and talked Hindustani better than English. There was also a nondescript collection of people who were consumed by a misplaced desire to play games and to dance, and who daily made a strange

exhibition of the British obsession for cricket by a travesty of that pastime which took up what room there was—though that was inadequate for the purpose—and disturbed all who were not equally dominated by a single idea.

"I suppose," Lady Blanche was impelled to remark, after she had been obliged to change the position of her deck chair for the third time, "that people of this sort have never read the Bible."

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed Bertram, a little doubtful whether he ought to be amused or shocked, and in any case failing to see the point of the remark. "What makes you think that?" he added, after ruminating on this knotty question for some minutes. "Everybody has read the Bible, haven't they?"

"Without attention then," said Blanche, getting quite sarcastic, for it was much too warm to be irritated; "or they would have found out that Solomon says that there is a time to do a thing and a time to let it alone. I am sure that a sea voyage is a time to let cricket alone."

Beyond causing her this sort of inconvenience her fellow-passengers troubled Lady Blanche but little, for the bulk of them never attained their object of making her acquaintance. She was an

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unapproachable person, chiefly because she was quite unconscious that anyone had any desire to approach her. She did not in those days credit anybody with any ideas or sensations to which she herself was a stranger. She had no desire whatever to speak to anyone on board except Charlesworth, and honestly believed everybody else to be equally indifferent.

There was one lady on board, however, who rushed the citadel of Blanche's indifference. This was not such a feat as it would have been had there been any defence, but the bride was quite as indifferent to the fact of knowing people as to that of not knowing people. The irrepressible lady came on board at Marseilles, but did not appear till the following morning, when on her first appearance after breakfast she made a rush for Bertram.

"Oh, Captain Charlesworth, to think of meeting you!"

"I might be just as much surprised," returned Bertram without enthusiasm. "I did not know you were going out again, as Eden has gone to the front."

"Oh, I am not going to India, only to Cairo," returned the lady, looking up at him through lavishly blackened eyelashes, and affecting childish

pronunciation. "Don't you pity poor little me, left all alone in England, with dear Bob gone to the war? It simply had to go somewhere to amuse itself."

"Let me introduce you to my wife," said Bertram, without a shade of compassion for her woes. "Blanche, this is Mrs. Eden. Her husband is one of our majors, now on special service."

Mrs. Eden could be very pleasant to other women if she chose. She was not nearly so stupid a little woman as she made herself out, and she knew to a nicety how to adapt herself to her company. She was not a bit too effusive to Blanche. Being very quick, she "sized up," as the Americans say, the bride a great deal better than the bride herself.

"I am sorry not to be able to welcome you to India," said the little woman, dropping the babyish affectation and apparently suddenly becoming grown up.

Blanche thought this civil of her, and was proportionately civil in her reply. Bertram looked on with the sulky aspect he always intended for coldness and dignity. People who habitually talk slang find it very difficult to assume the chilliness of perfect English at a moment's notice.

"I loved India at first," said Mrs. Eden in her

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self-compassionate tone. "But then I found it get so dull. Bob was always away shooting some horrid tiger or other, and poor little me left all alone."

"Why didn't you go with him?" suggested the innocent Lady Blanche, while Bertram's countenance assumed the expression of a man on the point of emitting incredulous whistles.

"Oh, impossible! I should have been bored to death," returned Mrs. Eden airily. "I hate sport; so dull and messy, you know; and the men who like sport are always so boring. Men are cruel brutes, aren't they?"

Lady Blanche had been brought up to think her own the cruel sex, but she had not the habit of contradiction. She murmured a vague "I daresay, I daresay," and Mrs. Eden ran on:

"Cairo is better than India—nearer home, and lots of fun to be had. You'd much better stay behind with me, and let Captain Charlesworth go on by himself."

This was scarcely Lady Blanche's idea of married bliss, but she smiled amiably as at a rather feeble jest, and said nothing.

"Oh, there's dear Mrs. Sandilands! I must go and speak to her," and Mrs. Eden literally trotted across the deck to a rather large and resplendent

lady who was trailing up and down in the most inappropriate foulard gown. The two almost collided with little shrieks of effusion, and echoes of "dears" and "darlings" reached the Charlesworths from amid a tornado of embraces.

"It reminds me of a little dog I had who, when she was let out of the kennel, always ran round and round with very shrill little barks of excitement," remarked Lady Blanche thoughtfully.

"Ghastly little woman!" ejaculated Bertram. "Great blessing poor old Bob Eden is at the front, and that we shan't have her at Pultanpore."

"She seemed to me a pleasant little thing," said Lady Blanche extenuatingly, "and very fond of her 'Bob,' as she calls him."

Bertram made an indescribable sound which was something like "hur!" and which his wife did not yet know to be his equivalent for the astonishing monosyllable beloved of novelists and spelt by them "pshaw."

Despite her rush into the "large embraces" of Mrs. Sandilands, Mrs. Eden returned to Blanche on the first opportunity. Her first impression of the bride was that she came under her own favourite category of "dull"; but after her conference with Mrs. Sandilands, and discovery who Blanche was, the little lady thought her worth cultivating. Mrs. Eden was one of those women

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who never know "who people are," the first necessity of a good education ; Mrs. Sandilands, on the contrary, bestowed on the Peerage the study which it is the popular delusion that Non-conformists bestow on the Bible. This amply-proportioned matron had been a barmaid in Manchester, and had never met any of the individuals mentioned in her favourite work. But she cherished for them the sentiments of the true-born Briton.

Mrs. Eden was one of those women who are best described as "fluffy." She was fluffy outwardly, and gifted by her Creator with the childlike aspect which deceives people to their undoing. It was impossible for anyone to be as innocent and helpless as she looked. She was equally fluffy mentally, being without memory of the most elementary kind, especially on occasions when she should have brought her purse, and being equally without the instincts which make people punctual or help them to find their way in a strange place. But morally she was most fluffy of all. She had no code of behaviour, not even of the fairly broad and general type of the Decalogue.

This Lady Blanche did not discover for a long time. Mrs. Eden wanted to make a good impression, and paid the closest attention to her P's and

Q's until the evening before the vessel was due at Port Said. Then her discretion went by the board, and her tongue let itself loose.

"I do envy you sometimes," she remarked, "going to India for your first cold weather. Oh, what a glorious time I had the first time I went!" and she gave a fluffy chuckle.

"Did you?" responded Lady Blanche. Mrs. Eden mostly did the bulk of the talking.

"Yes, and if it wasn't for Cairo being in the way I should come on with you; but my mother's in Cairo, and Bob made me promise I'd go to her. Otherwise—what fun I could have at Pultanpore! All the best-looking men there are in love with me."

"No, are they really?" exclaimed Blanche.

"Yes, of course. Most of the men I know are," returned Mrs. Eden.

Blanche believed this, and genuinely admired her. She knew quite well on her own account that no man had ever been in love with her, except Bertram Charlesworth, and vaguely felt that she must somehow have been a failure in woman's chief field of action. Her idea of love was not quite the same as Mrs. Eden's, moreover.

"Be sure you get to know General Ockerley," that lady advised Blanche; "but of course you will. Everybody knows everybody in a station

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like Pultanpore. He is a perfect dear, and his wife's so delightfully jealous of him that it is a real pleasure to see her. And you *will* like Major MacCorquodale. He is second in command of the Highland Regiment up there, and such fun ! They are a capital regiment—much better than our lot—up to anything. Poor dears, they were awfully carved up in the war, but some of the best ones are left, which is a blessing. The Colonel who was killed was a stick, and the one they've got now is not good for much. I believe he keeps a harem of black women, and I hate a man who does that."

"How horrid !" exclaimed Lady Blanche, conceiving an instant aversion to the officer in question.

"Yes, and so stupid too, when there are plenty of white ones only too thankful—— But Major MacCorquodale will get the regiment soon, so that will be all right."

"What about the 27th Lancers?" asked Blanche, who scarcely took the mildest interest in the unknown corps over which Mrs. Eden was so enthusiastic.

"Oh, ours? Well, the Colonel's not bad, if only he didn't let his wife mother the regiment so indecently. The adjutant is a stupid man, and

his wife such a prude she makes you sick. We're badly off for ladies in our lot. The second in command only married his wife as an afterthought—on compulsion. Nobody calls on her in consequence; he goes everywhere without her."

"That doesn't seem right. People shouldn't have him," remarked Lady Blanche.

"Why not? What does it matter what a man does?"

"But if he behaved badly to her?"

"I daresay it was three parts her fault. She certainly oughtn't to have allowed herself to be found out. But I believe she was an uneducated kind of person."

A quicker woman than Lady Blanche would have instantly asked for Mrs. Eden's views on education, and might have heard something remarkable. But Lady Blanche missed the opening.

"Is that all the ladies there are?" she asked, still with a vague sense that there was injustice in the air.

"Oh, dear, no. There's a preacher, a woman's rights sort of creature, who gets up and thumps tubs. And there's little Mrs. Cheswright, who wouldn't say 'boo' to a goose. Oh, and there are the Colonel's daughters—Faith, Hope, and Charity."

"Not their real names, surely? Or are they

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Quakers, or something odd?" asked Blanche doubtfully.

"Oh, dear, no; they're only nicknames. Everybody has nicknames in a regiment—didn't you know that?"

"What, the ladies too? Surely they haven't got anything to do with the regiment?" hazarded the innocent Blanche.

"Oh, haven't they? Charity would command the 27th, only the adjutant is such a smart soldier, and won't let her. Old Mrs. Woolrich says she looks upon them all as sons; I know she'd like to look upon them as sons-in-law, but there's no fear of that with *me* about."

Lady Blanche knew so little of the Army in general, and the type of woman she was speaking to in particular, that she allowed her mind to be prejudiced by these remarks. It was her simple habit to believe people until time and tide, which expose most people sooner or later, proved them to be liars. But they shook her belief in Mrs. Eden, even before she left the ship at Port Said.

Mrs. Eden talked a great deal, rambling from one topic to another, sometimes making fairly sensible comments, but oftener ones that sounded silly to Lady Blanche's sober mind. It was nearly all about herself and her attractions, and the effect they had upon men and women—fatal in the one

instance, and pulverising in the other. Oddly enough, she believed quite as firmly in the devotion of her husband as in that of every other man of her acquaintance. She did not by any means adopt the attitude of the *femme incomprise*, and thereby misled Lady Blanche, who knew that dreary variety of the Eternal Feminine, and appraised it at its approximate value. On the contrary, Mrs. Eden spoke much and affectionately of "dear Bob," waxing, as the night drew on, lachrymose concerning his absence and probable fate.

"Dear Bob's gone to the war," she wailed, "and who shall I marry if dear Bob's killed?"

This ejaculation sent the amazed Lady Blanche to her cabin at the hour of one a.m. (the earliest at which Mrs. Eden consented to bring her confidences to a close), to ask anxiously of Bertram Charlesworth if the lady were quite in her right mind.

"Oh, bless you, yes!" returned Bertram, who firmly declined to concern himself about those he hated and despised.

"But surely she is very unusual?" suggested Blanche.

"I don't know. I've met loads of women like her; the woods are full of them," yawned Bertram from his bunk.

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"Oh, not the woods, Bertie!" returned his wife, beginning to laugh. "I am sure, whatever Mrs. Eden is, it is not a lover of nature."

"Well, the streets then," suggested Bertram, as his last waking utterance.

It was only five hours after this that the *Oasis* put into Port Said. Rudyard Kipling, I think, calls Port Said the Clapham Junction of the world, and declares that everybody is sure to come to those interesting localities sooner or later. "Everybody" is a large term, and is usually used to signify the acquaintance of the speaker. I should be more inclined myself to call the Gares du Nord and de Lyons the universal meeting-places, for there are not many people with any pretensions to civilisation who have never been to Paris. There are, on the other hand, a good many people with every claim to be considered civilised who have never been to Port Said. For their benefit a short description of the place may be appended; it may assist to determine them never to go there. The immemorial East need not remain a sealed book to them in this case. There are other routes round the world.

That the land of Egypt is flat is a fact which we learnt in our infancy. It probably then went in at one ear and out at the other like other geographical intelligence, the science of geography being pre-

eminently one which is learned parrot-like, to the unenlightenment of the average mind. We can see on the map that Asia is bigger than Europe, but until we've been there nothing will convince us that it really is.

"Oh, are you going to India?" asks an excellent country neighbour. "You will be sure and look up my boy Johnny, won't you?"

If on arriving at Simla you discover that Johnny is quartered somewhere in the direction of Madras, and urge a fortnight's train journey as your excuse for not having paid the desired call, she does not believe you. It is a hackneyed prevarication she thinks, similar to that of the Guardsman who says he is "on guard" in order to avoid a disagreeable engagement.

Similarly, the fact of the land of Egypt being flat, though well known from infancy, only strikes the traveller on arrival at one of the Egyptian ports. A proper port—Dover, for instance—has cliffs all round it, or in some other way stands out from the sea, so that you can see it before you get to it, and taste of the joys of anticipation. But Port Said seems to crouch down into the Mediterranean as a hare crouches in grass, and until you are in the harbour you might well suppose yourself to be still far out on the turbulent waters of that ever-blue sea.

Agur the son of Jakeh might have added to the three things which were too wonderful for him—yea, four which he knew not—the way of the people who live in sun-smitten countries, and add to the general glare of nature by building themselves houses of an eye-destroying whiteness. It is an egregious fallacy to suppose that white (in a house) is a cool colour. A white house blazing up out of a sandy flat, which seems to pant with heat, is the hottest-looking thing in the world. The race vaguely (and I believe quite incorrectly) designed as Arabs, and at present inhabiting the country of the Pharaohs, has a passion for white houses.

This race also suffers under the distressing delusion that all human beings are deaf. No sooner had the *Oasis* dropped anchor than scores of dusky individuals, simply attired in abbreviated blue or white nightgowns, rushed on board yelling in a reverberating manner. They complicated a hitherto very simple situation, and reduced Lady Blanche to the wildest state of bewilderment which she ever remembered experiencing. It was not until she was in a boat in mid-harbour, well away from the ship and the uproar, that she became once more open to impressions through any sense save that of hearing.

The *Oasis* seemed suddenly to have yawned in

a hundred places, and up ladders into each chasm ran black figures bent under their burden of coal, grimy with the touch of it. From a distance they looked like little devils running into the mouth of the pit. Everybody had left the ship except the unfortunate persons whose duty forbade, and who were apparently condemned to swelter under a hot sun and to breathe coal-dust for twelve too, too solid hours. The sea looked like molten lead, and the heavens were as brass over them as they were over Elijah.

Lady Blanche, on shore, experienced the sensations of Perseus, in Kingsley's "Heroes," when "above him was the blinding sun in the blinding blue, and all around him was the blinding sand." She had, however, the presence of mind to refuse firmly a ride on a donkey, proffered her by a young gentleman in a dirty tarboush, who assured her that his animal bore the grossly misleading appellation of "Lovely Nice."

"We'll go the 'Continental' for luncheon, because everybody does," said Bertram, by way of assigning a really brilliant reason. "Until then we might go for a walk, what? A few days at sea always makes me want to stretch my legs."

He had a way of enunciating platitudes as if he thought they were bran-new epigrams, but Lady Blanche never found anything to object to in him

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either then or later. After all, it is the best the most brilliant conversationalist can do when all is said and done, for all the good things had been said even in the time of Solomon.

The rest of the passengers of the *Oasis* were evidently following the same unoriginal programme. Those who had never been in Egypt before were seen rushing to inspect a mosque with all the unintelligent curiosity of the impassioned sightseer. Mahomet might be to them only a name, and they possibly had not the most shadowy notion of his religion, but they were all agog to behold his sanctuary, and rather disappointed to find it "quite like a church"—in fact, more so than the average Nonconformist conventicle.

Those who flattered themselves that they were old travellers, and had therefore seen their mosque at varying periods before, ignored Islam, but sought the latest telegrams.

The provident were seen in the book-shop, laying in a stock of Tauchnitz editions; the salacious-minded gloating over photograph-shops, past which Bertram pulled his wife in haste; the sweet-toothed bought packets of Rahat Lakoum; the smokers, principally female, bought cigarettes. And Port Said glared at one and all till the "Continental" gathered them under its friendly wings for luncheon.

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The afternoon saw them speeding about in arabiehs; the cool of the evening in boats on their way back to the ship. If Lady Blanche's passing impression of Egypt was noise and glare, much like what she might have picked up without going further than the Promenade des Anglais at Nice during Carnival, was it strange?

CHAPTER III

THE remainder of the journey seemed a repetition of what had gone before; a little hotter perhaps, especially in the Red Sea, when humanity seemed to perspire even in the temper, and all the ladies who had started bosom friends became deadly enemies. Of these distressing tragedies Lady Blanche remained happily ignorant. She made no further acquaintances, nor missed them. The moonlight nights were her highest felicity, for she was still in the grip of that most beautiful lunacy known as being in love, and everybody on board, except Bertram himself, might have been parts of the ship for all the difference to his wife. Everybody, however, never found this out, which was to the good of their peace of mind, for it is far less humiliating to think that your neighbour gives himself airs than that he has not so much as noticed your existence. Of course, on dispersal the rest of the passengers talked for the remainder of their lives of having "come out in the same boat" as Lady Blanche Charlesworth, hinting

that they were her most intimate companions, and thereby basked in a vicarious splendour among their innocent acquaintance.

It is said that the three most beautiful sights in the world are the Bay of Naples, the Golden Horn, and the Harbour of Rio, but Anglo-Indians are of the opinion that the harbour of Bombay "out-shines them all." It bursts upon the unprepared mind of the newcomer at the hour of sunrise a picture from Nature's choicest gallery. The pen of a Byron or a Moore is needed to describe it, one to whom flowing epithets, scintillating with colour, come natural. It is not fair to anything really beautiful to write of it in cold, colourless prose, the same vehicle of language in which we order groceries from the Stores. Unluckily, poetry always eludes my unpractised pen, and so the reader must take the five-page description of Bombay Harbour, which by all the canons of novelist's art should be brought in here, as read.

Lady Blanche had read all the usual successful books which happened to be on an Anglo-Indian theme, but rather as one might a scarcely comprehended language. The whole *mise en scène* was absolutely outside her experience, and did not then seem to her very interesting. But as she stood on the Apollo Bunda, which already she knew so well by name, half-understood passages from Rudyard

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Kipling or Mrs. Croker sprang up in her mind, and she began to wish that she had read with more attention. She was the kind of woman who shows excitement by becoming absolutely dumb. Bertram looked at her, alarmed by her silence.

"You are quite well, aren't you, darling?" he asked suddenly in an anxious voice.

"Quite well," she answered, and turning her eyes on him with a smile, "Quite happy."

Bertram looked relieved.

"You are so awfully quiet, I was frightened," he explained.

"What did you expect me to do?" asked Lady Blanche, smiling. "There is nothing to scream about that I can see."

But some of their fellow-passengers were screaming for all that; some with joy at meeting friends again, others with unclassified emotions.

"Here," added Blanche, "is the father of all the oak trees. I believe he wants to speak to us, too!"

A very little and apparently prehistorically ancient native came up to them and announced that he desired to be Bertram's bearer, having filled that honourable post to his father. The late General Charlesworth had left Bombay on his way home some five-and-twenty years earlier, and his

faithful servant had apparently waited on the Apollo Bunda ever since. He further asserted that he remembered Bertram as the "chota baba," at a period when Bertram's father was the "burra sahib" at some station in the Punjab.

Since these unconscious days, Bertram had never set foot in his native India, but he had been prepared for some such greeting on his arrival by a friend who knew the ways of deceased parents' bearers. He knew quite well what to do, therefore, and asked for the old gentleman's "chits." Among these he soon discovered the departed General's well-known and conspicuously illiterate scrawl, setting forth that Buldeo Singh was the pearl of bearers, and forthwith professing himself satisfied by this possibly stolen testimonial, he abandoned his own suit-case and Blanche's dressing-bag, both aggressively new-looking, to the said pearl without further delay.

"But what beats me," he remarked to Blanche, "is how the old Johnnies know one is coming."

"Do you suppose he really knew your father?" inquired Blanche sceptically.

"He may have. The old boy was years and years in India; he went there before the Mutiny, and grilled in all the hottest places he could find in order to save money."

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"And did he make his fortune?" asked innocent Blanche.

Bertram laughed.

"My dear girl, millionaires may come out of grocers' shops or off the railway, but they never come out of the Army. By sacrificing any career he possibly could have had, my father saved about what his hopeful son spends in a month."

"But he became a General, didn't he?"

"I think they made him one out of sheer pity. He never had a command. Luckily, I had an uncle who had the pluck to snap his fingers at all his family, who'd been soldiers and sailors since the year one, and take to brewing. He left pots, and he was very decent about it; made all his stony-broke nephews and nieces share and share alike. My poor old governor always looked upon him as the skeleton in the family cupboard, too. Funny how things turn out, ain't it? I expect we of the rising generation wouldn't think much of the last except for my uncle Ned."

A good deal of this was Greek to Lady Blanche, in that she did not understand the antipathy of the professional classes to trade. In her eyes a brewer was probably quite as presentable a person as the average General or Admiral.

"It was very nice of your uncle," she said,

seizing on the part of Bertram's story which she understood. "People don't often trouble themselves about distant relations. I always think your brother's children such very distant relations."

"Oh, I say, they're by way of being near," replied Bertram, as if he thought his uncle was receiving more credit than was his due.

"They can't be so very near, seeing that they can marry each other," returned Lady Blanche, reducing Bertram to some bewilderment.

"Of course, I am grateful enough," he resumed. "By George, haven't I cause to be? My father and uncles were all in *foot* regiments."

"Tell me about your mother," said Lady Blanche. She was interested in her relations-in-law, and totally unaware of her good fortune in their having all considerably died before there was any question of her coming into the family.

"I believe she was one of a lot, and came out to India to get married," replied Bertram, briefly unvarnished.

"To seek her fortune too?"

"I suppose so. And if you women call getting married fortune, she found it. She couldn't grill in red-hot stations though. She tried to, but about three hot weathers finished her off. Poor

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little soul! I believe she was pretty. It's a beastly shame."

"That she died so young, poor thing?"

"That she was made to turn out of home because there were too many of 'em, and go to a climate that killed her. A man has no business to have more kids than he can look after." And Bertram, who was not used to discussing the birth-rate with a lady, even if she happened to be his wife, turned very red, but added hastily: "It's beastly selfish, and he deserves seven years. Now then, what shall we do? I believe the thing to go and see here are the what-you-call-'ems, where they bury the Parsees, or don't bury them, don't you know!"

"The Towers of Silence, do you mean?"

"That's it. Shall we go and squint at 'em?"

"Isn't it rather like wanting to go and see the Morgue when you are in Paris?" asked Lady Blanche with a face of distaste. "I think I would rather not, if you don't mind."

"Well, no, I suppose it is rather nasty," admitted Bertram. "Still, I think I'll go. It seems rotten to have been in a place and not to have seen what there was to be seen."

In which true spirit of the Anglo-Saxon Globe Trotter he set off, leaving Blanche to her own devices at the hotel.

That same evening they started up country. Bertram, who was a naturally happy-go-lucky individual, went through the usual qualms of such a one when he arrived at the station and suddenly remembered that he had made no arrangements for the journey whatever. But apparently some friendly magician had been at work. Their places were taken, their beds made; there was nothing lacking to their comfort, even to blocks of ice in the corner and soda-water in abundance. Lady Blanche probably attributed these arrangements to her English maid, who was to be seen looking out of a second-class carriage with condescending approval of similar ministrations to herself. But a dim memory of Indian reminiscences of his father's supplied Bertram with the clue to the matter.

"I've always heard," he remarked, "that Indian servants are the best in the world. I hope we shall find it too. It strikes me we've made a good start."

"Oh, is it all the old oak tree?" asked Lady Blanche. "How very clever of him! But Jennings must have given him a hint, for he has even put in the book I was reading, open at the place where I left off."

"She may have, but she can't speak the language."

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"The oak tree can make himself understood though," said Blanche, who generally shattered Bertram's propositions by her superior accuracy.

"But servants are very wonderful. I think they must have a sort of Volapuk among themselves, for they always seem to get on abroad."

"That reminds me," said Bertram suddenly, "that we shall have to learn this beastly language. I'm a first-class duffer at gibberish, too. Never could say a word of French except 'Garson'; and as to German, it always sounds to me like a fellow who has swallowed his false teeth and is trying to cough them up again."

"There is only one thing that I beg of you," said Lady Blanche, "and that is that you don't mix up Hindustani words, even when you know them, with your English. The Anglo-Indian people I have met always did it, and it is such an annoying habit! I don't believe that there is any Hindustani word for which there is no English equivalent, and it sounds as if you did not know your own language if you have to eke it out with another."

Bertram, painfully aware that his own English vocabulary was very small, shook his head and looked very solemn.

"I'll remember it, darling. But I believe it's an awfully easy habit to catch."

"Bad habits always are," remarked Lady Blanche dogmatically.

"That's some excuse, isn't it? I used to know tons of Anglo-Indians in my father's time; remember always seeing them when I was a boy home from school. They were the sort of old jossers who say: 'By Jove, sir, the Service is going to the devil!' and then yarned for hours about what they did in their time. There've been more of them about than ever since the war began, and yet I don't believe it's being half as badly managed as the Crimea. That's one blessing of coming to India. I do flatter myself that we shall dodge these old jossers. India's a young man's country."

"There's only one other thing I want you to do," remarked Lady Blanche, who had been getting very sleepy and inattentive during these remarks, "and that is to kill a tiger, or several tigers. They do make such nice mats to put about on the floor."

There is that about a new country that whatever one does in it has an enthralling charm. It matters nothing that we are only doing as thousands of people have done before us and as thousands will do after us. For us it is the first time, and that is as good as if we were the

pioneers of all ages. No one in love ever really believes that anybody else has been in love before. No young mother worthy of the name really thinks any woman ever had a baby before. And I do not doubt in the least that when we come to die we shall suppose that it is the first time such an event has ever occurred in the history of the world.

The fancy-free scoff at the first notion, the childless at the second, and, I expect, we should all hoot at the third. But when we begin to try these experiences ourselves, we change our tune.

Bertram Charlesworth and his wife made a thoroughly commonplace and necessarily cursory survey of India. They went to Agra and saw the Taj at sunrise, at sunset, by the light of the moon; and by the light of the stars, and were neither sufficiently simple nor sufficiently complex to be disappointed. They saw Lucknow, and heard Mutiny stories till they could almost imagine themselves to have been present at the most stirring scenes of that time of delirium. They went to Delhi and Benares, and were crammed with a great deal more history and philosophy and theology than they could digest. Everywhere they met with a kindness and hospitality hitherto unknown

to them, and everyone had given them nothing but the most roseate glimpses of Anglo-Indian life.

Lady Blanche, when she arrived at Pultanpore, believed India the divinest possible country. To her it meant a delightfully prolonged honeymoon. Such persons who had intruded on the rapturous wandering *à deux* had been mere shadows on the blind, agreeable shadows withal and anxious to please. A really successful honeymoon is a good experience to have been through ; and so is a very pleasant journey in a new country, where there is plenty to see and it is all beautiful and interesting. The two combined are worth going through a good deal to obtain, and they fell into Lady Blanche's lap spontaneously, without her being aware of her good fortune.

Seen through these rose-coloured glasses, any country would wear a halo of beauty and charm ; but India more than another, because the glamour of immemorial Ind has enchanted us English for so many generations that it is in our blood to come under its thrall. If when the fathers eat sour apples the teeth of the children are set on edge, even more when the fathers have drunk nectar are the children intoxicated with the draught. There may be other lands as beautiful, as rich in historical and poetical associations,

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but it was India that was the El Dorado of our fathers' dreams, and that dominates the imaginations of their descendants.

Unfortunately, El Dorado is still a country between sea and sky, and none of us have ever seen it save in a mirage. The travellers may tell tales of it still to dazzle the stay-at-homes, but they themselves know that it "never was on sea or land," and they know that their brother travellers know it too.

But now and then, for one "crowded glorious" moment, one of us fancies that he has attained that unparalleled land. So Lady Blanche thought, as she traversed India, and believed that her life would be this moving kaleidoscope of colour and scent, with the only unchanging thing in it, the man she loved. In this beautiful mood she reached Pultnapore on the evening of the ninth day after their arrival at Bombay.

Bertram, who had got out of the train first, came back beaming.

"Cheswright's come to meet us. Awfully good chap, Cheswright; he was at school with me," he explained, without any punctuation whatever. His sudden delight apparently arose from the imminent prospect of meeting his brother officers again, personages whom he had last seen seeking

death or glory on a South African battlefield, and whose individualities he had allowed to remain under a cloud of mystery to his wife. This would appear to be a characteristic of the average Englishman, who from the day that he first goes to school seldom refers to his habitual associates, if male, by any less generic name than "the fellows."

Captain Cheswright, of the 27th Lancers, was a young man of the unmistakable English Army pattern, which seems to be turned out by some wholesale manufactory somewhere. He was certainly clean, and probably brave; he was neither ill-born, ill-mannered, nor ill-looking. But he had no single personal characteristic either of body or mind to distinguish him from nine out of every ten cavalry officers in the service. And though a person of this description may be quite a piquant variety to meet when your lines are cast in other places, he becomes, when you have constantly to meet several hundreds of him, distinctly monotonous.

He and Bertram instantly began the kind of conversation which is most wearying to the uninitiated. We all know its trend. We come in among a set of people who are all intimate with each other though strangers to us; one of them

exclaims "Cow!" and the rest rock with laughter. The probabilities are that even if the jest were explained to us we should fail to grasp its dazzling wit, but this sort of epigrammatist never explains. In this vein burst forth Captains Cheswright and Charlesworth, apparently taking it up where it had been left in South Africa six months before.

"I've brought down my trap," explained Captain Cheswright, in a lucid interval, "and you must drive up in it. I've got my bicycle, and I'll do outrider. My wife would have come with me, Lady Blanche," he added, "only she had gone to an afternoon dance at the club."

Pultanpore was so very much like every other Indian station that has ever been heard of that Lady Blanche almost felt as if she had been there before. It lies between the Grand Trunk Road and the jungle, and as Bertram drove her up the Mall, with its tan ride, past the thatched-roofed bungalows standing in their compounds, it seemed absurdly familiar. Yet she had never been east of Suez before, and it was unthinkable that in a past transmigration she could have been a dweller in India.

A mile or so from the station, Bertram, following Captain Cheswright's bicycle, turned to the left for a few yards, and then to the right, past

a deprecating-looking church. At the gate of the first bungalow beyond, Captain Cheswright precipitately dismounted, and had another lucid interval.

"We thought," he explained, with all the vagueness of royalty or a newspaper editor, "that this would be the bungalow you would take; but until your things come, we thought it best to put you up for the time being in Shipton's—one of our Majors, Lady Blanche, who has gone home on leave."

"I'm sorry you've had all this trouble, old chap," exclaimed Bertram, suddenly discovering himself to be under an obligation. "Couldn't we have gone to a hotel until we settled our traps?"

"Hotel? Bless you, there's none in the place. The Shipton's bungalow is just behind yours. Come along!" and he hopped on to his bicycle again.

Before the door of the "Shipton's bungalow" was so considerable a crowd of natives, all busy salaaming, that both Bertram and Lady Blanche supposed that the whole native population of the place had gathered; expecting remunerative occupation in unloading the bullock-cartload of luggage which was still wending its very slow way from the station. Captain Cheswright, however,

explained that the native regiment in question was the usual quantity of indispensable domestics.

"But I can't need so many," exclaimed Lady Blanche, wondering if even Heribert sheltered so large a body of retainers.

"Oh, yes, you will; probably more when you get your ponies. Each pony has to have a syce to himself, you know, besides a grasscut; and—"

"But where shall I put them all?" demanded Lady Blanche, with a despairing glance at the bungalow's high-pointed roof.

"Oh, they have their houses in the compound, bless you!" Captain Cheswright had no notion of the relief caused by his nonchalant words. "Come in, won't you? What would you like to do? It's still quite early, and everybody will be at the club. Shall we stroll over there?"

Bertram caught an appealing glance, and answered it to his brother officer.

"If I know anything of *her* after a month of matrimony, I should say No, thanks. Her idea will be a wash after a journey. But I'm game to come, old chap. Let's be off."

On his return in time for dinner Bertram found his wife in deep woe, owing to the reptiles and insects in her bathroom, and to her mind out of place there.

"A horrid frog!" she exclaimed pitifully; "a

horrid, greasy, slimy-looking beast! Jennings" (her maid) "screamed, and I am sure it was enough to make anyone scream to see it flapping about and then going down the hole. And the whole place is insects."

"That's nothing," returned the unsympathetic Bertram, "to what it will be like in the hot weather."

He was brimming with information about this particular part of India after two hours' cramming by Captain Cheswright and others.

"But we needn't stay to be devoured by creeping, crawling things," she objected.

"I shall have to," he replied. "I've had so much sick leave already, owing to having got in the way of that bullet at Klip Kraal. Fancy! there's a fellow in the Highland regiment here who was invalided home quite at the beginning of the war, and is only just come back, though there's been nothing on earth the matter with him. Now I——"

"I am very glad *you* were invalided home," returned Lady Blanche softly, forgetting the insects and reptiles. "If you had not, we might never have met."

"That would have been awful," remarked Bertram, not meaning to be sarcastic.

"It all came of your being in Miss Zimmerman's

private hospital," went on Lady Blanche with joyful retrospection. "Do you remember the rich Jew lady who made her house into a hospital, and called herself Sister Marjorie? She asked all her friends, my father among the number, to take her soldiers into the country when they were convalescent, and that was how it *was*!"

"Lucky bullet!" murmured Bertram. "If I had been a Johnny in a book I ought to have saved it and worn it on my watch-chain, or given it to you to make a diamond tiara out of. But I don't know where it went to—clean through me somewhere, I suppose. Oh, it's a great thing—war!"

"Thank goodness, it's all over as far as you are concerned," said Blanche, hindering his dressing operations considerably by suddenly clasping him round the neck.

"Don't say that. I might have got a D.S.O.," returned Bertram, "or even a V.C. It's mostly a question of opportunity," he added, as if to guard beforehand against being accused of overrating his personal valour.

"I would rather have you than all the V.C.'s ever cast or forged, or however it is that they make them," said Blanche ardently.

"You are very affectionate to-night, old lady. What's taken you?" inquired Bertram.

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Her arms dropped to her side as if he had thrown them off. He instantly snatched up his brushes from the table on which the Pearl had laid them out, and brushed as if for dear life. He had no idea of the chill he had struck into her heart, for she said nothing. She was not the kind of woman who cries out when she is hurt.

CHAPTER IV

“O F course they are very kind,” said Lady Blanche deprecatingly, “but their taste is not good—now is it?”

She was sitting on “the Shipton’s” settee (for it could not be called a sofa) and looking round at the trophies of bamboo and hammered brass, supposed by courtesy to be decorating the drawing-room of that temporary place of residence. A certain type of person’s ideas of the beautiful in house decoration consists of draping every piece of furniture as if it was an indecent sight to behold, and diverting plates from their proper office by setting them to crawl up the walls in wire frames, looking like horrifying spiders. Mrs. Shipton was this type of person. All the furniture in her house was bandaged with silk scarves till it looked like the patient in an ambulance class. This analogy was carried out by the fact that the scarves held nothing together, which Lady Blanche proved by undoing a few to see.

“Isn’t it?” queried Bertram vaguely. “I

don't know anything about furniture. It don't look specially *homely* to my mind, but maybe nothing does in this climate."

He looked upon all climates but his own collection of samples with an insular eye.

"I hope our own things won't look so—so breakable," said Lady Blanche. "I have a horrid sensation that if I stir this thing I am sitting on will give way, the tables will all fall over, and the things on the walls come down and I shall be left sitting among the ruins, like Caius Marius and Carthage."

"Let's hope none of these things will happen," remarked Bertram, unmoved by this classic simile. "For everybody will come and call on you to-day."

"Oh, need they do that?" inquired Lady Blanche in a very dubious tone.

"Of course they must, and of course they will," returned Bertram. "Cheswright says that they have been boiling up for weeks with new bonnets on purpose. In a station like this people must be neighbourly."

"Doesn't that depend on the people?"

"I don't know," said Bertram, who had never given any reflection to this point. "But Cheswright says they are a ripping lot of ladies here; he's never seen prettier or better dressed women

in his life. They are very gay too. Look at all that sheaf of invitations waiting for you."

Lady Blanche took them up with a face quite inexpressive of the delight he expected. The Colonels and officers of both regiments stationed at Pultanpore requested the honour of Lady Blanche and Captain Charlesworth's society at a most miscellaneous collection of entertainments both indoors and out. A long list of persons, most of whose very names Lady Blanche had never even heard before, thirsted for their company at dinner. The dramatic talent of the station desired to display itself before them in some venerable farces, which Lady Blanche was born too late to have witnessed in London. One or two cards bore the word so exciting to youth—"Dancing." The Lancers' band, it appeared, played bi-weekly in the afternoon at the Club, and wished the new-comers to hear it. The General's wife was getting up a picnic, and hoped Lady Blanche and Captain Charlesworth would join.

"But of course we needn't go to any of these things," remarked Lady Blanche.

"Not go!" exclaimed Bertram, in tones which made her look up at him in surprise.

"Oh, of course if they would amuse you, dear Bertie, let us go by all means," she replied. "But I thought they would bore you."

"And you?—won't they amuse you?" he demanded.

"No, they won't. I would far rather stay at home with you."

"Don't you care at all for society, then? You never gave me any reason to think so before," he said in a tone of vexation.

"But I don't know any of these people, Bertie——"

"That don't matter. You will soon get to."

"And I don't think I care for society." She was thinking of crowded Mayfair ballrooms; of Ascot, Goodwood, and Hurlingham; of the three summer months when there is no time to think, scarcely time to speak, and only time to dress and hasten about a very small radius of London. "But never mind. It doesn't matter. I will do whatever you like best."

"You'll be awfully bored here if you don't go out at all," remarked Bertram, half appeased.

Lady Blanche sighed. She thought she was far more likely to be bored by being called upon to revel with strangers than by the *solitude à deux* she loved. But one of her peculiarities was never to expect to be understood. The average woman is furiously indignant and aggrieved if she is misunderstood. She appears to fancy everybody's attention to be so fixed upon her personality that

no *nuance* of the same can by any possibility escape notice. Lady Blanche was not an average woman—she was too humble-minded.

It was about midday, and Blanche and Bertram were only just up. Their first caller had already been and gone; the second at this very moment was driving up to the verandah. Bertram had darted out, and his voice was heard in effusive welcome before Lady Blanche had risen from the rickety sofa.

“Mrs. Woolrich, our Colonel’s wife,” introduced Bertram, in the showman’s voice he put on when displaying his newly-acquired wife to his old associates.

Mrs. Woolrich had evidently been told at some time of her career that the most suitable pose for her was the maternal. Her personal prolificacy had ceased at the three daughters who followed her into the room; but to hear her talk, one might have supposed her a reincarnation of Cybele, mother of the world. The curious part about it was that genuine children could not bear her.

She would have embraced Lady Blanche with very little encouragement, but this she did not receive, as Lady Blanche was not fond of caresses, even from friends. Mrs. Woolrich was reduced to verbal gush.

"We have been looking forward so much to your coming, dear Lady Blanche," she gurgled.

"Very kind of you, I am sure," returned Lady Blanche conventionally.

"These are my daughters," went on Mrs. Woolrich, adding in a sort of stage-aside, "Such *dear* girls! Such favourites everywhere! Happy indeed will be the man who wins such treasures!"

"Only one man between the three!" ejaculated the startled Blanche, staring rather wildly at the treasures.

Mrs. Woolrich looked about as much pleased as a person whose advances have been received by a thrown bucket of water.

"Of course not, my dear Lady Blanche," she returned in the voice of an injured turtle-dove. "But no doubt you are not much interested in young girls, you yourself one so recently a bride. Ah, how delightful to be newly married! What a sweet thing is a young wife!" and she looked at Lady Blanche tentatively with her head on one side.

The Miss Woolriches now thought their mother had monopolised the conversation long enough. They advanced upon Lady Blanche—that is, two of them did. The middle one, who rejoiced in the sweet name of "Ethel," had a marked predilection

for the society of married men, and was making eyes at and "chaffing" Bertram in as far distant a corner of the room as she could attain.

Alice, the eldest Miss Woolrich, might have been rather pretty if she had not sedulously cultivated a blighted appearance. Seven years before, the sole *prétendant* to the honour of her hand who ever appeared on the scene had thrown her over after an engagement of two weeks. Alice never forgot this episode, nor allowed any of her acquaintance to forget it either.

Gertrude Woolrich, the youngest of the sisters by some four or five years, might easily have been any age between twenty-five and fifty. She was very tall, and very much over-developed. Nature having given her a mighty frame, she had increased it by all means in her power. A vast waist betrayed her innocence of stays; hands of the dimensions of a leg of mutton had never any opportunity of losing their pronounced hue by means of the friendly shelter of a pair of gloves; and it was popularly reported that one of her shoes had been used before now as a toboggan.

"I hope you will enjoy Pultanpore, Lady Blanche," remarked Alice in the voice in which Jeremiah might presumably have uttered his lamentations. "It is considered a delightful place by those who can still enjoy life."

"It isn't half a bad hole," struck in Gertrude, whose tones resembled the bark of a hoarse retriever. "I'm trying to get up a ladies' cricket match, Lady Blanche. Will you join?"

"I don't play cricket, I'm afraid," began Lady Blanche, but she was interrupted by Mrs. Woolrich.

"Indeed, no, you shall not tease dear Lady Blanche with your dreadful cricket. You girls do not understand that a young married woman may not like to rush about and play rough games," and Mrs. Woolrich accompanied this remark with such nods and winks that Blanche turned desperately to the elephantine Gertrude.

"I should be delighted to play with you if I could," she said. "But I am sure I could never catch a ball. It must hurt your hand so."

"Oh, not a bit!" returned Gertrude, displaying her huge palms with an expression of satisfaction unwarranted by their appearance. "You soon get hardened to it. To be sure they do blister and sting a trifle just at first; but it's nothing, bless you! You come out with me one morning, and I'll chuck you a few easy ones just for practice."

Lady Blanche might have committed herself to this painful exercise, but that Ethel Woolrich,

who was finding Bertram impervious either to "chaff" or sentiment of the robust kind in which she habitually dealt, turned from an outlook on the verandah.

"Here comes Mrs. Culloch, mum. We must scuttle."

"Must you?" began Lady Blanche conventionally, but apparently the Woolrich family never allowed a sentence to be finished.

"Oh, yes. We aren't on speaking terms with Mrs. Culloch just now," replied Ethel, who combined some of the prettiness of Alice with some of the bulk of Gertrude, though she was much the shortest of the three.

"I don't consider Mrs. Culloch at *all* a nice kind of person," observed Mrs. Woolrich with her dove's voice altered to a severe key. "Well, good-bye, dear Lady Blanche. And if ever you want my *advice* or *assistance* I shall always be most happy to give it you."

The lady they had made such speed to avoid ambled into the room so soon after their exit that it seemed as if she must have collided with them on the verandah. It appeared not to have been the case, however.

"I hope I am the first; oh, I do hope I am the first!" she piped. "I was here nearly an hour ago, but when I asked your bearer if you were

in—he, he, he! he said: '*Mem-sahib palang par hai, sahib se.*' Wasn't that funny? He, he, he!"

"I have no doubt it was," returned Lady Blanche. "But I don't understand Hindustani."

"Oh my, what a pity! for now the whole point's lost. I couldn't possibly tell you what it means before Captain Charlesworth," kittenishly. "Shall I whisper, though?"

"Please don't trouble yourself," replied Blanche, recoiling at the prospect of the near approach of the lady's very-much-scented person.

Mrs. Culloch was a most gaudily dressed individual of the type which "does not dye" its hair, but "washes" it with henna, and which would never dream of "painting," but thinks nothing of reddening its lips with lip-salve and drawing a blue pencil round its eyes to make them look as if they had been "put in with a smutty finger" (an object not attained by this measure, however).

"I hear you came as far as Port Said with Minnie Eden," she remarked. "Dreadful little woman, isn't she?"

In the living presence of Mrs. Culloch, the fading recollection of Mrs. Eden seemed to Lady Blanche quite a pleasant one. But Mrs. Culloch

did not wait for answers. She ran on to a jingling accompaniment of bangles.

"The way she goes on—there! you wouldn't believe it," she remarked. "The whole station thought she would have eloped with Major MacCorquodale last cold weather. And such a fool she was making all the time of that young Sir Herbert Flinton of yours! One's heart simply bled for the poor boy. What!" suddenly pouncing down upon a card which Mrs. Woolrich had thought fit to deposit on her exit. "The Woolriches have been here, and you never told me! But never mind. I *was* first, wasn't I? I shall count the first time, he, he, he! Well, and what do you think of those girls? You know what they call them, don't you? Faith, Hope, and Charity, and the greatest of these is Charity. But that seems to me so obvious and crude. Regular garrison wit! So I call them Faith the Forsaken, Charity the Cricketer, and Hope the Husband Snatcher. Ha, ha, ha! Isn't that good? You'll think so when you know them, anyhow."

Mrs. Culloch was one of the people who interlarded their English sentences with Hindustani words. After a little of her conversation Lady Blanche gave up in despair, attempting to follow

it. At first, in deference to her hostess's ignorance, the lady condescended to speak her native tongue, but she soon forgot to do so.

"Don't you think we might go out into the verandah?" suggested Lady Blanche at the first pause, feeling that the small drawing-room could no longer contain Mrs. Culloch's stifling scent and oppressive prattle.

"Do let's! then we shall see the people as they arrive. You're expecting the whole of the *mem-sahib log* this week, aren't you? What fun! I do long to hear what you think of them. I can tell you——"

But Lady Blanche quickly changed the subject with the scene, and once on the verandah the lady was soon diverted from her intentions.

"Oh, there come the Cheswrights! Isn't Captain Cheswright a dear, and hasn't he got a smart little *tum-tum*?"

Blanche, not knowing this slang word for a trap, looked rather aghast and froze into silence.

Mrs. Culloch became more voluble than ever on the arrival of the Cheswrights. Of the lady she took but little notice, but she figuratively threw herself—scent, bangles, *frou-frous* and all—on the neck of Captain Cheswright. Under her evil influence the poor man deteriorated visibly. He giggled responsively, and rolled his eyes to match

hers; his remarks were unintelligible as hers, and very nearly as voluminous. They discussed everything under the sun in the space of about five minutes, and dismissed it in two words. If it was not "pakka," it was "kacha," and it seemed there was no more to be said.

Mrs. Cheswright—a very small, tearful-looking woman, whose hat was always on one side—was so obviously annoyed with this dialogue, and so much absorbed in her annoyance, that she could scarcely spare even the most perfunctory attention to her hostess's conventional platitudes. Lady Blanche relapsed speedily into silence. Mrs. Culloch enjoyed herself thoroughly; she believed herself to be having a great *succès*. And as to be the centre of everything was her main object in life, she was certainly getting the best of it. Bertram vanished on the pretext of having to report himself to the General, and Lady Blanche sat with her arms folded, casting about in vain for topics which might beguile Mrs. Cheswright from the fascinated contemplation of the other two.

This went on for about half an hour, for Mrs. Culloch's audience was presently augmented by two Lancer subalterns, whom she would scarcely permit even to greet Lady Blanche. She evidently believed herself to be holding a court, as she

perched herself high, showing a good deal of tartan stocking and patent-leather-shod foot swinging to and fro. She was the kind of lady who apparently dresses in the cast-off buttons and badges of her husband's regiment. These exquisite ornaments clasped her waist and peered forth from among her ruffles; they jingled on her wrist, twinkled on her feet, and all the space on her person which was not monopolised by them was taken up by a knot or streamer of the regimental ribbon. Thus a great deal in the way of odds and ends peculiar to a Highland regiment was displayed to the view, for Mrs. Culloch was a tall, albeit a narrow, lady.

"Are we all going to the picnic the Burra Mem has on next week? Oh, that will be good!" she called out generally, without waiting for an answer. "I do dote on a picnic, it's such fun. What can we do to make it rowdy, Captain Cheswright? You think of something. I was at a picnic in the hills the other day where we all rolled down a bank——"

"Please, Charlie," whined Mrs. Cheswright, breaking in on Mrs. Culloch's laughter at this mirthful reminiscence, "I think we *must* be going."

She had not addressed three sentences to Lady

Blanche, whom she had presumably come to see, but this she was not aware of. She looked more tearful and more lopsided than ever as she made this appeal.

"Oh, no, you can't take him away yet," exclaimed Mrs. Culloch, and Lady Blanche was not sure that she did not add that such conduct would be "filthy." "I haven't half done talking to him. I shall send my *tum-tum* into the *thandah sarak* for another half-hour. This is what comes of you being so delightful, Captain Cheswright."

"Charlie, we really must—must be going," said Mrs. Cheswright, almost in tears. And Lady Blanche, dreading an apparently imminent scene, instinctively stood up.

Mrs. Culloch laughed loudly; this was the sort of thing which enhanced her value in her own eyes. The two subalterns were uncertain whether to giggle with her or to take their cue from the decided disapproval manifested on Lady Blanche's face. Captain Cheswright, meeting this, abruptly came to himself, and looked thoroughly uncomfortable. Mrs. Cheswright, her hat well over one ear, stood up limply, and put out a shaking hand to her hostess.

"Oh, you are a wet blanket, Mabel Cheswright!" cried Mrs. Culloch. "What's the matter

with you? *Baitho*, do, and let's have some fun. I haven't heard half the *gap*."

"Good-bye, Mrs. Cheswright," said Lady Blanche markedly.

Mrs. Culloch stared at Lady Blanche. She was used to her hostile gaze abashing anyone on whom it was directed. It surprised her when Lady Blanche met it full.

"Is it war?" said the one pair of eyes. "As you please," answered the other. And there was no peace thenceforward—on the one side, at any rate. The reasons assigned by Jehu were not lacking either.

At this point one of the subalterns broke the sudden pause by saying nervously, "Here come the Gillespies."

Mrs. Culloch threw back her head with her shrill laugh.

"Oh, if High Sassiety's coming, I'm off!" she cried. "You'll like Mrs. Gillespie, Lady Blanche," she added with intention, jumping off her perch. "You'll have a lot in common. You'll get on."

"If she is a nice woman, I hope we shall," said Lady Blanche—polite, but quite cold. Mrs. Culloch's eyes tried to challenge hers again, but met nothing but the indifference of which Mayfair has made a fine art.

"I'll pay her out!" fumed the lady to herself, and the most obvious way of achieving this end striking her instantaneously, she assumed what she believed to be a smile of fine malice as she shook hands.

It was noticeable that the whole of Lady Blanche's visitors fled before the approach of Captain and Mrs. Gillespie, and Lady Blanche was left alone to confront the new-comers. This, coupled with Mrs. Eden's description of Mrs. Gillespie as a prude, which Lady Blanche remembered as she greeted that lady, threw a sudden searchlight on the mental and moral characteristics of Mrs. Culloch and her attendant subalterns which they might have avoided if they had foreseen it. A certain type of woman calls women prudes and men prigs, and thereby makes a hopeless self-betrayal.

Mrs. Gillespie was one of the women who never has a hair out of place. She was never inappropriate even under the most incongruous circumstances. Thus, though she may not have been better looking than her kind, she invariably made a better effect. She had some of the adaptability that is more a cosmopolitan than a British trait. Yet she was Scotch born and Scotch married, and had not a drop of any but British blood in her veins.

Lady Blanche, whose judgments at that time were more instinctive than logical, knew at the first word that she and Mrs. Gillespie were to be friends.

"This is your first visit to India, is it not?" asked Mrs. Gillespie. "I won't be like an interviewing reporter who rushes on board your steamer in New York Harbour and ask what you think of it already."

"I think very well of it, though," answered Lady Blanche, adding, "as far as I have gone."

"There is an element of caution in that which appeals to our Scotch natures," said Mrs. Gillespie, with a glance to include her husband. "If you can help it, do not go any further. But my advice is useless, I know. Six months hence I will ask you how far you have gone."

"Then you don't like India?" inferred Lady Blanche. "You are the first person I have met who has not assured me I should love it."

Mrs. Gillespie had a way of looking at the speaker which can only be described by the French word *moqueuse*.

"Oh, India is Paradise," was all she said, "the paradise of the middle classes. But the second orthodox question to ask you is, Has your husband bought any ponies yet?"

"Not yet," answered Lady Blanche. "I sup-

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pose ponies are indispensable, so it must only be a matter of time."

"I assure you, Lady Blanche," said Captain Gillespie, a man with a figure which would have revealed itself even under the disguising outlines of a sack, "that my two Arab ponies are the only tie I have to life."

"Isn't this nice for me to hear?" asked Mrs. Gillespie, a very fine pair of eyebrows, the best feature in her face, raised in satirical arches.

"My dear, I hope you will follow me to heaven; I have not the same confidence about the ponies."

"You seem very sure of going to heaven," said Lady Blanche, laughing.

"Oh, yes!" he answered earnestly. "Mrs. Lovibond—do you yet know Mrs. Lovibond? No? A pleasure to come then—asked me the other day if I was saved. I answered: Indeed, yes; I have done all my purgatory here on earth. I have been in the army twelve years."

"But I have been given to understand that the army is the best of all possible professions, and the 27th Lancers the best regiment in it."

"Charlesworth's creed!" said Captain Gillespie. "He always was an optimist. But, then, he has always been a bachelor."

"My dear Hector," broke in Mrs. Gillespie,

"you are in a fair way to be misunderstood. My husband, Lady Blanche, is not as bad a one as his casual words would lead you to suppose. He merely has a theory that the army ought to be like the Catholic priesthood—vowed to celibacy."

"He did not practise what he preaches, then," retorted Blanche.

"I admit it. But I knew no better then, just as Charlesworth knows no better now. I am making more converts, though, than Mrs. Lovibond is. I am being enormously assisted by the War Office, and I doubt very much if it is helping her at all."

Lady Blanche laughed, but rather doubtfully.

"This," remarked Mrs. Gillespie, in a stage aside, "is what it is to have a husband with a hobby. I do not get a chance of opening my mouth."

Captain Gillespie merely looked at her. But Lady Blanche shuddered at the heretical thought which flashed across her.

"I wonder if Bertie will look at me in two years' time like that?"

"Will you and Captain Charlesworth dine with us to-morrow night?" Mrs. Gillespie asked.

"Pray say No at once if you would really rather not. When I first came to India, I was inclined

to say : Save me from my would-be hostesses. I can defend myself from the people who don't invite me."

"I should like to come very much," said Blanche truthfully. "How long have you been in India, by the way?"

"I came out to join him when the regiment was ordered here from South Africa. They"—Lady Blanche noted that Mrs. Culloch would have said "we"—"lost so many in South Africa, you know; they were the first cavalry regiment there."

"And Mrs. Eden, when did she come out?" asked Blanche.

"Oh, she was here before. Colonel Eden was on the staff for years. Is she a friend of yours?" asked Mrs. Gillespie, without any expression in her voice.

"Hardly a friend. I met her coming out." Mrs. Eden's remarks were vivid in Lady Blanche's mind, and she smiled as she spoke. Mrs. Gillespie caught the smile, but it was impossible to tell how she interpreted it, either by her face or her voice, as she answered :

"Then I may really expect you to-morrow? That will be nice, especially if you will let Hector ride his hobby to death. There will be another

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man there who will have some light to throw on the same subject, unless I am mistaken."

"I will prepare Bertie," answered Lady Blanche. "Perhaps he will be able to convert you instead of you him."

"Oh, please do count on it," said Captain Gillespie, in his earnest way.

CHAPTER V

THE Gillespies' was the furthest of all the cavalry officers' bungalows from the church, and it was less expensively furnished than that the Charlesworths had just quitted when they arrived very punctually for their promised dinner. There were no crawling plates on the walls, nor were there any unnecessary bandages on the furniture; but there was little or no attempt at prettiness, and Lady Blanche, as she looked about a very unpretentious little drawing-room, was vaguely disappointed. Something about Mrs. Gillespie suggested an artistic nature. Her drawing-room gave the lie to the suggestion.

"You expected a prettier room," were her first words.

Lady Blanche blushed, but could not deny it.

"Forgive me," said Mrs. Gillespie, laughing; "it is a shame to take advantage of you; but has no one ever told you that your eyes speak? Yes; you expected a pretty room, and this is a plain one. But I can give a reason. I am like

a cat—very much attached to places—and I do not want to get attached to India. I keep all my nice things in England, that where the treasure is there may the heart be also.”

“I am afraid you are prejudiced against India, Mrs. Gillespie,” remarked Bertram.

“Not against India itself. But I must tell you who are coming to meet you. They are both interesting people. The girl is the daughter of a retired colonel who married a Kashmiri lady, and always lives here. She is the youngest of nine, and each of the others died when they were twenty-one of consumption. She will be twenty-one next year, and she knows she is doomed. Is it not sad? She is a charming girl.”

“How dreadful!” ejaculated Lady Blanche.
“Can nothing be done?”

“No. They say that it is the invariable result of marriages of Europeans with Kashmiris. It does not seem to be intended. Yet white people can intermarry with blacks with impunity. The provisions of nature are strange, are they not?”

“But nowadays science has advanced so much, surely something could be done?” insisted Blanche.

“Ah, it is just possible that in Europe their lives might have been saved if they had been taken in time. But then how were they to get

there? Poor old Colonel Dommartin is very poor."

"Surely his friends might have——"

"I don't think he has any in Europe; he has been out here so long, ever since the Mutiny, or even before, I believe. And his friends here are nearly as poor as he is. In any case, it is too late now, more's the pity! She is a dear, lovely girl. Her people call her Flo, but I don't. It is a pity to shorten a name like Florence; it means flowers."

"Poor thing!" was all Lady Blanche could say.

"The man who is coming," went on Mrs. Gillespie briskly, "has only just arrived, but we have known him for years, as his people live near mine in Scotland. His name is Torquil MacLean."

"Is that MacLean of the Highlanders?" asked Bertram quickly, and on receiving an affirmative answer, exclaimed: "Ah!" and froze visibly.

"You have heard things against him already," said Mrs. Gillespie, in the quiet voice of one who affirms, not one who conjectures.

"Not to put too fine a point on it, I have," replied Bertram. "I shouldn't have mentioned it, though——"

"Well, Captain MacLean is a great friend of

Hector's," said Mrs. Gillespie. "If you must judge a man before you see him, will you judge him by his friends—not by the remarks of his enemies? I am not afraid," she added, smiling, "of trusting you if you judge him by Hector."

Bertram made elephantine struggles to say something graceful, and failed miserably. This is another retribution which periodically overtakes those who habitually talk slang.

Here Captain Gillespie appeared.

"I am not going to apologise for being late," he remarked, almost before he was in the room. "I have been labouring up to the last minute on behalf of my ungrateful country, and I am too proud to excuse myself."

"There is no occasion," said his wife calmly. "Florence has not come yet, and here is Captain MacLean only just arriving."

Lady Blanche thought she had never in her life seen two better-looking specimens of the human race than the two guests who arrived last. Torquil MacLean was the sort of man who, inconspicuous by himself, had the quality of making all other men look common beside him. He was fine ivory where they were bone, chiselled gold where they were hammered brass. Captain Gillespie, who was not a good-looking man, suffered less by comparison than Bertram

Charlesworth, whose fresh, full-blooded English good looks suddenly appeared coarse and bloated. His clothes, ordinarily quite inoffensive, looked as if they did not fit him; he looked hot, dishevelled, scarcely even clean—all by contrast. There are men and women who may be clothed by the first English tailors or French dress-makers, but who never seem well suited to their habiliments. There are others who would look imperial in rags. Bertram was not exactly the first, but Torquil MacLean was certainly the second.

As to the girl, she had the beauty which makes old wives shake their head and say it is the fingers of Death which make the clay so fair. Both Mrs. Gillespie and Lady Blanche were handsome women, but they could not have flashed into the room and drawn all eyes to them, like this unknown colonel's daughter. The wild mountain rose is beautiful, and withers as soon as plucked. So bloom those under sentence of death.

There is a strange beauty in a woman delicate. An earthly bride in love, be she never so plain at other times in her life, is beautiful for one moment at the consummation of her happiness. The bride of the Church is beautiful from the strong shining of the spirit through the flesh.

And the bride of Death is beautiful already with the beauty of another world. All these are set apart from their fellows, sanctified by the purity of a passion without themselves.

There was something saddening in the sight of Florence Dommartin, but the girl did not seem to feel it herself. She was as gay as if she were going to an earthly bridal, and in this put the last touch to the impression her extraordinary beauty made on Lady Blanche. It seemed to her that it was like the fleeting gleam of sunshine before thunder, when the beams lie golden across a black cloud, and the whole air is full of tension. If the girl had been sad, or even serious, Blanche's emotions would not have been touched to the quick as they were now.

"How lovely she is!" she said, turning to Captain Gillespie as he put her into her place at dinner. "Oh, the pity of it!"

"Everything," said Hector Gillespie, answering the thrill in her voice rather than her commonplace words, "is always for the best."

"It is very difficult sometimes to see it."

"In that case we must blame our limitations—not circumstances."

Florence Dommartin coming in with Torquil MacLean, sat on Captain Gillespie's left.

"No one ever has roses like Mrs. Gillespie,"

she remarked, smiling at her host. "How I wish it was we who had the only well in this place."

"Poets—who, by the way, are very misleading people," he answered—"give one to understand that there is something very superior in Oriental roses. If you have a feeling for that sort of thing, it gives you a pleasant sensation in the backbone to hear about the Roses of Ispahan. Is that Persia, though, by the way?"

"I know what you mean." Mrs. Gillespie had a habit of answering her husband and keeping up a conversation with him across her own with other people. It was rather a pleasing habit, as showing that they had never come to satiety, but could still strike sparks from each other. "I always had a similar feeling about the Waters of Sing-su-hay. I don't know where they are, or even if they really exist, but I am sure they are very nice."

"I never heard of them," said Bertram.

"I don't suppose you have. I never met any soldier except Hector who habitually read poetry. But, then, Hector is full of unusual accomplishments."

"To tell you the honest truth," said Bertram, "I think poetry is piffle."

"Of course you do. So do all sane people."

"Oh, come!" exclaimed Bertram, bursting into a laugh. "Don't you think Gillespie is sane? Do you hear that, Gillespie?"

Mrs. Gillespie looked across the table with an enigmatical smile.

"If I don't, it is not an uncomplimentary opinion." A recollection flashed across Blanche that she had once heard or read of the insanity of genius. She wondered if this was what Mrs. Gillespie meant. "But I should like to point out that I never said *what* Hector *thought* of poetry, I merely said he *read* it. Do you never read 'piffle'?"

"Oh dear, I wish I never did!" aspired Miss Dommartin. "One never gets anything else from the club library. I do hope Lady Blanche has brought out a good list of new books, and will write it down in the order book. You can't imagine the desperate things the ladies here get a hold of. 'Three Shrieks at Midnight, or The Footman's Revenge'; 'Was it Suicide?' or the Pile of Clothes on Westminster Bridge'—and that sort of thing."

"I should like to be the mediæval hermit who, when he wanted to read a book, wrote one," remarked Captain Gillespie.

"Wouldn't that be laborious?" asked Torquil MacLean.

"Very, especially in my personal case. But then I should be certain of always reading sense."

"That depends a little on the point of view," said Mrs. Gillespie. "I think it just possible that your superiors might not see the sense of the sort of book you would write."

"No, I should most certainly be instantaneously told that His Majesty had no further use for my services. But I think I could bear that with equanimity—strong in the consciousness of my virtue, and that the book would sell."

"Lots of fellows have left the army and taken to writing books and plays," contributed Bertram. "I suppose they found it paid better."

"I suppose they did," returned Captain Gillespie in a voice of withering sarcasm. "They could not well have found it pay worse, could they?"

"I don't know," said Bertram. "I have always understood penny-a-lining was a poor trade."

"And that the service was a rich one?"

"Well, no," admitted Bertram.

"At any rate, what they make goes into their own pockets," observed Torquil MacLean. "How much of our pay goes into ours?"

"No, of course it don't," returned Bertram,

shooting an antagonistic look across the table. "But then one isn't in the service to get anything out of it."

"*You* aren't," retorted Gillespie, "and I thank the Lord that I am not. But how many poor devils are, think you?"

"Oh, well, then, they oughtn't to be," said Bertram finally. "We've no use for poor fellows in the service. What we want is fellows with from five hundred to **five** thousand a year."

Captain Gillespie **threw** himself back in his chair with a laugh of scorn which sounded like a short bark.

"And where are they to come from, might I ask?" he demanded.

"Well, they can always get officers," said Bertram obstinately. "Fellows are always only too glad to go into the army, bless you."

"The failures are," said Torquil MacLean.

"Not only the failures," rapped back Bertram with another glare. "The pick of the country."

"Come, come, Charlesworth," said Captain Gillespie. "Do you mean the intellectual pick, or the pick from the point of view of birth and breeding? If you do, I disagree with you. The clever fellows take their brains to the best market, and small blame to them. As to the upper classes, a small percentage of them go to the

Guards as an education, but how many to the line as a profession, unless they are deadly poor? Answer me that. If you say we get the pick of the middle classes, then I agree with you. I think we do. But I don't call the middle classes the pick of the country. They may be the backbone of England, but they are neither its head nor its limbs; and what is the good of a backbone without either?"

"Well, I think there's a class of itself that feeds the service, and that always will feed it," said Bertram. "And a doocid fine class too, fellows who are the sons and grāhdsons of soldiers, and whose mothers and wīves are soldier's daughters."

"What you say is true as far as it goes," said Gillespie. "But the question is, is that the class we want?"

"It's a very fine class," reiterated Bertram.

"It's bred to its purpose," rejoined Gillespie. "But heredity must tell. Are the kind of soldiers who did very well in old times the kind we want now? I'm not saying anything against them, mind; but they can only transmit their own qualities to their descendants, that's only a law of nature; and are those qualities sufficient for modern purposes?"

"They could fight all right," cried Bertram, "They can still fight all right. Nobody can say we haven't fought and aren't fighting still in South Africa."

"Nobody can say we can't and don't follow, but who can say we can lead?" returned Gillespie, who was now thoroughly warmed to his subject. "What did the Continent say of us at the beginning: 'An army of lions led by jackasses.' And why can't our officers lead? First of all, because they haven't got the brains; and secondly, because they haven't got the blood. You know yourself—we all know—that the men know fast enough whether their officers are gentlemen or not. Of course they know! Their kind have been led by the aristocracy for a thousand generations; they were bred for it. And why don't they get the aristocracy of birth and intellect to lead them? I'll tell you——"

"I deny that we can't lead," put in Bertram sulkily. "I think we lead as well as could possibly be expected of mortal men. I am sure none of us were afraid of getting shot."

"Gillespie didn't mean that," said Torquil MacLean; "he was talking of Generals."

"That's not the point," cut in Captain Gillespie, who was ignoring his dinner as he leant across

the table in Bertram's direction. "I never impugned anybody's physical courage. It takes a braver man, by the way, to run away from a battle than to stay where he is; but that's neither here nor there. A hundred years ago that was what was wanted—a man who would rush to the shambles. It isn't wanted any more. In the Peninsula, when men fought hand to hand, very likely you killed your man at the same time as he killed you, and it was all made even. But nowadays one combatant sits behind a rock in perfect safety and kills the other two miles off. And what we need is to be the man who sits behind the rock, and not the man who gets killed. And it's not courage that will make you that; it's intelligence."

"Well," began Bertram, "I'm sure they make exams stiff enough——"

Gillespie waved him aside.

"We don't get the brains. We don't get the best the country can give us. You know we don't. And why don't we? Firstly, because of the money. The pay's not big enough. You aren't contending that it is? No, of course you're not——"

"No, but we don't serve because of the pay," protested Bertram, harking back to his former argument.

"There are other things besides that," put in Torquil MacLean.

"Secondly," went on Gillespie, ignoring them both, "because of the life. A soldier to be all he might be must be an unmarried man. Yes, my dear Lady Blanche," swinging round towards her, "a man may have his profession at his finger ends, but it's all stultified if he's a married man. There must come times when his duty as a soldier and his duty as a husband and father pull two ways. And no man can serve two masters."

"But then, of course, in that case, a fellow can't have any doubts," remarked Bertram. "He must do his duty."

"Duty, of course; but which duty?" asked Gillespie.

"Why, hang it all, of course, his duty to the service," exclaimed Bertram.

"No, Captain Charlesworth!" flashed out the hitherto silent Mrs. Gillespie. "A man who thinks so has no business ever to have married. Oh, poor Lady Blanche!" she added to Florence Dommartin, "how we are frightening her!"

"But there is another reason against the service, and a stronger one than either of those," put in Torquil. He spoke slowly, and his words dropped like trickling cold water as compared

with Hector Gillespie's eager lava-stream, and the savour of the water was as bitter as gall. "And that is the *clou* of the whole matter. It is the system the whole army is run on—a system of jobs. I don't mean the obvious jobs, ladies going and cajoling the War Office, which the papers always catch hold of and give tongue over. That's nothing. A mere drop in the ocean as far as the army's concerned. What I mean is this. In every other profession under the sun a man gets on on his own merits. In the army he doesn't; he gets on by favour. A soldier may have forgotten more about his work than his colonel ever knew, but if that colonel doesn't choose to recommend him, he may just as well be an ignoramus. He can't get on. That's what takes the heart out of men. It's not the money—it's not the life—they'd come without money, they'd live the life of anchorites, if they could get on on their own merits. But when their superior officers block them for personal reasons, spoil their careers to gratify some prejudice of their own, well, thinking men won't stand it."

"Well, but a colonel does not block a man for no reason except spite," began Bertram.

"Oh, doesn't he?" retorted Gillespie, with his

barking laugh. "You listen to what Torquil can tell you. That will change your opinion."

"He not only can, but does," went on Torquil, still in his slow, cold tones. "He refuses to recommend a man for other reasons besides sometimes—equally bad ones. Gillespie can tell you that."

"Yes, I can, by Heaven!" Captain Gillespie bent across the table again. "Now, Charlesworth, am I a bad soldier—a useless duffer at my work—a disgrace to the service?"

"No, of course not, don't talk such rot!" returned Bertram. "Everybody knows you're a long way the smartest fellow we've got in the regiment."

"I've always taken an interest in soldiering," proceeded Gillespie. "I was red-hot keen as a youngster; I never shirked. I've read half the books on military matters ever written, not only the English, but the German and French ones. I could always pass examinations without cramming. I'm one of the very few officers in our army who is any practical use at Russian. I always went, whenever I could, to Continental army manœuvres. Am I boasting when I say this, Charlesworth, or am I speaking the plain fact?"

"Boasting? No, by Jove! Understating it, if anything," rejoined Bertram enthusiastically.

"Well, as you know, I was down on the list for the Staff College. Some years ago I took a Yeomanry adjutancy. While I was on that job I thought it would be a good plan to go in for the Staff College. So I worked like a horse, and spent all my leave at a crammer's. He said I was safe to pass into the Staff College high up—first, he said—as I was the keenest pupil he ever had. Then I sent in my application to go up for the exam, and Woolrich refused to recommend me for it. He said officers who took adjutancies always came back dirtier and more slovenly than they went away. Well, I'm too old now to try again, and I have had my enthusiasm knocked out of me. As soon as the war is over I'm going. I'm damned if it will be my loss."

He flung himself back in his chair.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Bertram, visibly shaken.

"Listen to him," went on Gillespie, leaning forward again and pointing to Torquil MacLean.

"He can tell you some more. He's on the same road—not so far on as I am, but well on for his age. Tell him, Torquil. He's heard the other side; let him hear yours. Why," went on

Gillespie, excitedly, leaning half across the table towards Bertram, "isn't that fellow there a D.S.O.? He's earned it as fairly as anyone in South Africa, ten times more so than some of them. If his colonel—Craig, a good fellow; he was at Eton and Sandhurst with my elder brother—hadn't been killed in his first engagement, Torquil there would probably have been a brevet-major by this time at the very least. Why isn't he? All because of this blessed system of recommendation."

"When Colonel Craig was alive, the second-in-command, Jenkins, did me the honour to dislike me," Torquil took up the parable without the slightest change of voice. Gillespie gesticulated, ran up and down the gamut, vibrated with excitement; but the iron and ice of the Highlander never softened or melted. "I was invalided home with enteric. While I was at home I got an ingratiating message to the effect that Jenkins meant to break me if he could. I moved heaven and earth to get back to the front with another corps, to exchange to another regiment or to our own other battalion. It was all no good. I have every certificate under the sun, and I don't think I did less work, at any rate, than other fellows in South Africa. But every application had to go through my colonel, and he

wouldn't recommend me. Moreover, he put it about that I did not come back to the regiment because I was scrimshanking. I've got a weak heart. I got it after enteric and exposure; lots of fellows get it. The doctors wouldn't pass me fit for foreign service for nearly two years; they won't pass me for active service now. I should have sent in my papers if the war hadn't been going on. I have come back to show Jenkins I won't be broken. But I shall chuck it up the very day peace is declared."

"Is that the rights of it?" asked Bertram rather feebly, turning his head from Torquil to Gillespie.

"That is the rights of it," confirmed Gillespie with a grim nod.

"Then I'm sorry, MacLean," said Bertram frankly. "I misjudged you. But I'd heard your brother officers first."

"Don't apologise," said Torquil frostily. "My brother officers share the amiable colonel's prejudice. One might last out one colonel if one had the strength of mind. But our present second-in-command is just such another, and the next man too. Twelve years of hanging on by one's teeth would wear out even a bulldog. I'm not a bulldog. I'm going. But I'll go at my own time, not theirs."

"I'm jiggered if I blame you," returned Bertram, gazing approvingly across the table—approval which was wasted on its object.

"There's no other profession where this sort of thing can happen," went on Torquil. "In business or law or medicine or the Church, a man comes to the top by his ability and industry. If he works he gets his reward. If a man has a master and don't like him, he can change him. If one master won't give him a character, another will. In the army you haven't even the choice of a servant to choose who shall recommend you. They don't do things our way in the navy. I daresay a captain of a ship often takes a dislike to an officer, and is a beast to him. But at the end of three years, sometimes less, the officer leaves him and goes to another ship. We can't get away. Look at me and my twelve years of adverse colonels ; look at Gillespie, and the short time before he is superannuated."

"Yes, that superannuation ! it's ten years too soon at the very least," cut in Gillespie. "Why in heaven's name can't they either let us go when we are young enough to learn to do something else, or else keep us till we're too old to want to?"

"That's a red herring across the scent, Hector," rejoined Torquil MacLean. "If the system of

recommendations, as at present practised, were done away with, there wouldn't be any superannuation of the good men. They would all get on; it would only be the duffers who would have to be turned out of the army."

"I don't make out," remarked Bertram doubtfully, "how you're going to improve the system, or what you're going to put in its place. You can't have fellows recommending themselves, you know."

"Of course not," replied Torquil. "But why should every other British institution be democratic and this alone be autocratic? Why should all this power lie in the hands of one man, when in every other department of the constitution it lies in the vote of the majority?"

"I still don't make it out," remarked Bertram, shaking his head. "Would you make all promotion go by ballot?"

"I think," said Torquil more slowly than ever, "I would like to see the colonels of regiments deprived of their veto. They ought not to be allowed to use their individual judgment, but to be obliged to recommend a man when he applies for any billet, provided he has a certain number of years' service and certificates."

"I should also like to see the whole system of confidential reports done away with," added

Gillespie. "It is—it must be—a farce, and why encourage it? A colonel often has to sign a confidential report on a fellow he has barely seen; to say whether he has a good temper when he—the colonel—cannot possibly have any means of knowing; or whether he is a good drill, when he has never seen him on the barrack square. A good-natured colonel might report favourably from not wanting to do the fellow an injury, and afterwards might find out faults which he would feel bound to mention next time; an ill-natured colonel might say something against the fellow not knowing whether it was true or not; or there might be different colonels each time who would give a totally opposite opinion of the same man. Where's the sense in all that? It's perfectly childish."

"A colonel can't report badly on you without showing you," remarked Bertram, whose mind worked too slowly to take in more than one point at a time.

"He's supposed to, I know," returned Gillespie with an air of reservation.

"You're awfully suspicious, old chap," remarked Bertram gaily.

"I have some reason to be," retorted the other.

"Oh, come now, you know it wouldn't be an honourable thing to do," returned Bertram.

"My dear fellow, are officers and gentlemen invariably honourable? Have you never known anything happen in the service that was not entirely in accord with the highest code of ethics? Take one instance familiar to us all. How about the sketches which every officer has to certify were done with his own hand, and which as often as not he bribes a sergeant of engineers to do for him?"

"In the end," remarked Torquil MacLean, breaking in imperturbably on Gillespie's heated sentences, "we come back to what Hector said at first. We don't get the right men in the service, or these things would not be. If you ask me, I should say that the average officer in the British army at this present moment was an overgrown schoolboy from a second-rate public school. He has the same intelligence, amount of education, and code of honour."

"And the thing we have to ask ourselves," supplemented Gillespie in his hurried way, "is whether it is worth a man's while, under the circumstances, to give himself up body and soul to the profession. While one's in the service, as you all know, neither your body nor your soul is your own. You can't stir hand or foot without asking permission. Any other man on earth's his own master. He doesn't have to ask anybody's

leave before he comes and goes. You're a white slave, and there's no Wilberforce to speak up for you. It's childish to treat grown-up men as if they were children—schoolboys, as Torquil says, from a second-class school, where they don't know how to behave themselves. And what do half of us British officers get out of the army to make it worth our while?"

Bertram shook his head for several minutes. Captain Gillespie woke up to the attentions of the Kitmagar who had been patiently offering him a savoury for some while. Torquil, who had been going on peacefully with his dinner, laid down his knife and fork.

"We've been neglecting the ladies a good bit," remarked Bertram at last.

"Do you think so?" said Mrs. Gillespie, smiling. "We have been listening. You forget that the army concerns us very nearly. We're soldiers' wives and a soldier's daughter, and the facts affect us most particularly, in some ways which Lady Blanche knows nothing about as yet. But she will soon learn."

"Ah, as to soldiers' wives and daughters, that opens up another whole side of the question," said Captain Gillespie. "Personally, I have thought since I married, and believe every other soldier who marries a woman of the upper classes

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has thought, that soldiers' wives and daughters ought to be as non-existent as priests'."

"Complimentary!" said Bertram, laughing to Mrs. Gillespie.

She nodded.

"Thoroughly complimentary," she replied. "I give you six months in which to formulate a similar compliment to Lady Blanche."

CHAPTER VI

IT was the day following the dinner with the Gillespies that Lady Blanche made the acquaintance of that important institution of Indian stations—the Club. The Charlesworths' first day at Pultanpore was taken up almost entirely by sitting in the verandah choosing ponies, of which quadrupeds a surprising quantity were forthcoming. To the no small surprise and chagrin of the would-be vendors, they discovered that Bertram Charlesworth knew altogether too much about horseflesh for their profit, and those who had come gaily in the confident hope of disposing of ancient and undesirable screws for untold gold, went away disillusioned, and still in the possession of the said screws.

To Bertram, the sale or purchase of anything equine was so serious a transaction that he was unable to see any of its humours, and he secretly thought Lady Blanche frivolous for laughing at the crestfallen countenances which one by one filed away out of their compound. Like most

men who conceive themselves to "understand women," and to have been, in their time, exceedingly conversant with what they are pleased to call "life," he seldom had the foggiest notion of what was passing in a woman's mind if it happened to be of finer texture than his own. Least of all women did he understand Lady Blanche, who barely understood herself as yet.

A sense of humour is a rare gift, but a sense of the ridiculous is common to most people. It is only a question of degree. In Lady Blanche it was considerably more sensitive than in Bertram, who could not be moved to mirth by anything more subtle than the kind of jest that the *Pink Un* and such other publications innocently label "Wit and Humour." To Bertram, the thought of any mishap to the person or habiliments of his neighbour was exquisitely mirthful, and he was enabled by his beatific temperament to extract rapture from the process of breaking furniture or crockery after dinner. There is something disarming about these elementary characters.

Lady Blanche was as little subtle as she was neurotic. She was a young and healthy animal, and it was as such that she loved Bertram. Mentally she was entirely out of sympathy with him; but she was unaware of it, not having attained her

full mental growth. Now and then she lighted fleetingly on deficiencies in him, which with characteristic humble-mindedness she attributed to herself. But the bandage was yet on her eyes, "Love is blind." It is a half truth, like most-proverbs. There is one kind of love that is blind, and woe betide us when it ceases so to be. There is another kind of love that is more far-seeing than any eye of mortal.

Their first day at Pultanpore being entirely devoted to the equine race, it was only decent that some portion of their second should be at the service of the human. So Lady Blanche and Bertram drove one of their new ponies to the Club, and there met the few notabilities who had not called upon them, and the many who had.

The Gillespies were not there, neither was Torquil MacLean ; but Mrs. Culloch was, and immediately fell upon Bertram as a hawk might on a chicken out of a blue sky. Only the chicken would probably be fully aware of the hawk's nefarious designs, whereas Bertram, when he was effusively greeted by a woman who might easily be passed by the unexact as good-looking, believed himself to be rather fortunate than otherwise, especially as Mrs. Culloch's companion, who happened to be a subaltern in her husband's

regiment, observed the said greeting with an undisguisedly jaundiced eye.

The Woolriches were also there, and Mrs. Woolrich, with the air of an ambassadress making the presentation of a countrywoman to a Continental sovereign, ushered Lady Blanche up to the General and his wife.

"I am glad to meet you, Lady Charlesworth," remarked the latter graciously. She was a lady, to put it mildly, of opulent charm, and had a fancy for inordinately gorgeous costume. She was at that moment dressed in an Ascot frock of rose-coloured tulle and a large picture-hat. The upper half of her person was hung round with chains and bead necklaces, like a cross between the Lord Mayor and a son of Ham from one of the less accessible parts of Central Africa.

General Sir Arthur Ockerley, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., was the kind of exiguous partner whom ladies of robust proportions seem invariably to pick out of all other men. Tactful people who wanted anything from him invariably opened their siege by referring to the microscopic proportions of Napoleon, Wellington, and all other famed commanders. (As a matter of fact, a good many gentlemen famous in the field were above the average height, but it is unnecessary at these times to pander to a passion for accuracy.)

Sir Arthur married as a subaltern the quartermaster's daughter, who forthwith relieved him of all professional anxiety by commanding first his company, then his regiment, and finally his brigade for him. The unforeseen result of this thoughtfulness on her part was that he reached his anecdotage at a premature time of life.

Miss Ockerley was so very much like her mother that no one could have married her under any illusions as to her probable appearance as a middle-aged woman. No man apparently cared to risk it, though dozens of subalterns successively offered her the sprat of their attentions in the hope of catching the whale of her father's approval. The young lady lolled in a deck chair in an attitude which requires great length of limb to render it graceful, and looking the while rather like a partially collapsed apple-dumpling, made acid remarks disguised as friendly conversation to the eldest and youngest Miss Woolriches. (Ethel Woolrich was sitting in the farthest corner of the club verandah with her father's second-in-command—a married man, it need scarcely be added.) The hapless Alice looked increasingly blighted under these polite attentions from the General's daughter. The stalwart Gertrude fingered a tennis racket absently.

Colonel Woolrich, a man of indeterminate

brick-dust appearance, with a moustache like a sofa valance, held forth in robust tones against the reedy voice of Sir Arthur.

"What I say is, the army needs reform," he was heard to exclaim with high originality. "Very badly it needs it. Fighting nowadays has no sport about it whatever. I like to see the good old Berserker spirit, and, by Gad, sir, I should like to see the good old Berserker weapons too! I'm all against this new-fangled arming the cavalry with rifles. What they want is the sort of weapon that will be useful to them in a charge."

"They want the sort of weapon that will be useful to them, undoubtedly," quavered the General with reedy satire.

"Exactly; and what would be useful? Lances and swords? Pooh! A man can strike downwards twice as hard as he can ever thrust forwards. Give them"—and Colonel Woolrich emphasised his advice with a wagging finger—"give them battle-axes—battle-axes, sir, the good old Danish battle-axes. That is what they want."

Sir Arthur looked as miserable as if Colonel Woolrich had caught him sitting on a heap of these warlike implements while the whole empire was going to rack and ruin for want of them.

"Is that what is generally thought in the

army," he inquired feebly, "or is it your own idea?"

"Entirely my own idea!" said Colonel Woolrich proudly.

Outside the august circle in which the Ockerleys and Woolriches and Lady Blanche sat, circled a number of persons understood to be inferior, providing plenty of entertainment to Lady Ockerley and Mrs. Woolrich, and incidentally a certain amount—of a different sort—to Lady Blanche.

"There goes that Mrs. Puam in *another* new dress! I should like to know where she gets *that* from, now!" exclaimed Lady Ockerley. "Not from her husband, I'll be bound. *I* don't get two smart frocks in a week, and I take it that a general officer can afford a better dressed wife than a civilian doctor can."

"These Irish Roman Catholics have such deplorable ideas of propriety," murmured Mrs. Woolrich, in flat defiance of statistics. "One really cannot expect anything of them."

"Goodness me! will you look at Mrs. Lovibond?" ejaculated Lady Ockerley, who seldom took much notice of what was answered to her. "Whatever can she mean by coming here in such a costume as that? I simply call it putting a public slight on us all to come out such a dowd."

"She gives away so much money to mission-

aries that she cannot afford herself any new clothes," explained Mrs. Woolrich. "She told me so herself, and tried to persuade me to give the price of the girls' last new ball-dresses to the Society for Providing the Jews with Peach-fed Ham. But Alice and Ethel would not hear of it, even if I had felt inclined——"

The strictures of the Olympians were broken into now and then by the loud laugh which betrayed Mrs. Culloch's vacant mind. This, however, passed unnoticed save by Lady Blanche, Mrs. Culloch being evidently considered the glass of fashion and the mould of form. Mrs. Puam, one of those very pretty women whom the Sister Isle seems to turn out in batches, came trailing her presumably ill-gotten splendours over the verandah, and waved a lace handkerchief in a perfectly-gloved hand to Alice Woolrich, who received the attention deprecatingly. The Irish-woman was certainly charmingly turned out. She would have done credit to the Rue de la Paix, and she wore a great many ornaments, about which she always volunteered that "the Parisian Diamond Company's imitations were so wonderful." Somewhat to Lady Blanche's surprise, after their remarks, Mrs. Woolrich and Lady Ockerley smiled very graciously on Mrs. Puam, and encouraged her to revolve in their august orbit for a short

space. She had a man with her who was rapturously addressed as "Prince," and qualified when spoken of as "the dear Prince."

"I daresay you have met the dear Prince before, Lady Charlesworth," remarked Lady Ockerley in a stage aside.

Blanche shook her head.

"I do not think so, but I may have. A Russian, I suppose."

"Yes; his other name is unpronounceable," said Lady Ockerley with pride, as if this reflected additional glory on his associates.

"All Russians are princes," said Blanche, unconsciously making an enemy of Lady Ockerley on the spot.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the General's wife in what she believed to be a most snubbing tone; "evidently you have moved in such select society that you think nothing of princes, ha!"

The monosyllable with which Lady Ockerley finished was neither a snort nor a laugh, but an indescribable note, combining scorn, incredulity, irony, and every other sentiment calculated to make the presumptuous shrink. It had been known to reduce meek women like Mrs. Cheswright to tears, and it invariably curbed the pretensions of such as Mrs. Culloch. But on Lady Blanche it produced less impression than water

does on a duck's back, because she was equally unconscious that she had offended or that she had been snubbed.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Puam had moved on, escorted by her prince and by an overdressed little girl of eight who minced in her mother's wake with all the airs and graces of the typical miss of eighteen fresh from a boarding school.

"It is time that child was sent home," observed Lady Ockerley, staring after the pathetically absurd little figure, with its frizzled hair and gorgeous frills.

"She is certainly dreadfully spoilt," cooed Mrs. Woolrich. "I cannot conceive why her mother keeps her."

"As a sort of chaperon, I suppose," observed Lady Ockerley with the ruffled exclamation she had used before.

"Perhaps," murmured Mrs. Cheswright, who had somehow unnoticed insinuated herself into the chair next Lady Blanche, "the poor woman is fond of the child, and does not like to part with her. I happen to know little Dodo is the only one out of four whom she has reared."

"Oh, poor thing!" said Lady Blanche. "It must be the most dreadful thing in the world to lose a child."

"Nearly all women in India have to go through

the most dreadful thing in the world, then," replied Mrs. Cheswright with a quavering laugh.

"Do they? Poor things! How is that?"

"Oh, it is such a bad climate for children—not little babies—they are generally all right—but things of two or three. Why, it's a bad climate for grown-up people; they are always dying—fever, cholera, sun, all sorts of things you are in no danger from in England; and they are strong, grown-up men and women in the prime of life. So think of what it is for tender little children!"

"Have you children?" asked Lady Blanche suddenly.

"Three," returned Mrs. Cheswright in a hungry voice. "I left them all at home; I couldn't bear to bring them out."

Lady Blanche looked at her sympathetically. She was sorry for this abject little woman, whose feelings seemed to be so near the surface. Her hat was trembling on the edge of the perpendicular. Lady Blanche felt a sudden impulse to straighten it, pat Mrs. Cheswright's face, dry her moistening eyes, and generally treat her like a child that needs comforting.

"You will go back to them some day soon, and that will be better," she suggested vaguely.

"The eldest is only four, and will have forgotten me," quavered Mrs. Cheswright.

"Mabel is in the doldrums as usual," called out Miss Ockerley from the chair. It struck Lady Blanche whimsically that she looked like a squat toad spitting venom as she made this sympathetic remark.

"Please, please let us talk about something else!" whispered Mrs. Cheswright hurriedly to Lady Blanche, but she was too late.

"India a bad climate for children? What nonsense!" exclaimed Lady Ockerley. "It is a capital climate for them. It is most ridiculous of you, Mabel, not to have yours out. They will forget you completely before you go back."

"I—I think I see Charlie beckoning to me," cried Mrs. Cheswright rather wildly, and left the Olympian circle at an uncertain run, in the opposite direction from her lord and master, who was playing lawn tennis.

Lady Blanche moved to wrath always spoke slowly and distinctly.

"How could you say that," she demanded of Lady Ockerley, "when it is just the thing the poor woman is afraid of?"

If a bomb had been thrown into the Olympian circle, or an angel had descended from heaven into its midst, or any other startling and unusual occurrence taken place on the small portion of the verandah which that select group encompassed, it

could not have caused as much sensation as this remark which Lady Blanche uttered, certainly with indignation, but without an idea of its paralyzing effect. A man might insult the King to his face, rush into the path of a racing motor-car, or pluck a particularly cross-grained lion by the tail with more impunity than so address Lady Ockerley. The Olympian circle sat speechless, watching Lady Ockerley's beetroot-coloured face with agonised interest. Sir Arthur displayed a spirit which it is to be trusted he would not exhibit in the field, and fled headlong. Colonel Woolrich prepared with undisguised excitement to mark the effect of a woman's tongue as an even more deadly weapon than his cherished battle-axe. His spouse and family seemed frozen in open-mouthed attitudes. Only Miss Ockerley giggled maliciously in the depths of her chair.

And lo! after all this preparation, there came nothing but disappointment for the spectators. Lady Ockerley choked violently into her cup of tea, and her countenance deepened rapidly through all the shades of crimson, magenta, plum, mulberry, and violet to black, while there was a general rush to her aid, a proffering of handkerchiefs, smelling-salts, and a perfect chemist's shop full of medicaments, Miss Ockerley alone venturing to slap her formidable parent on the back.

This stirring scene drove her indignation entirely out of Lady Blanche's head, and she never discovered it to be the effect of which her speech was the cause.

The rush round the General's afflicted lady drove Blanche some yards backwards, and when it had subsided she found herself completely excluded from the Olympian circle. The companions of her exile were Florence Dommartin and the ill-dressed lady who had been stigmatised as having put a public slight on the company by means of her attire, and who, eyeing Lady Blanche through her pince-nez, began at once :

"I have not called on you yet, Mrs. Charlesworth, but I was intending to do so as soon as my work permitted. I trust you did not think me remiss?"

"Oh, dear, no," returned Lady Blanche, intending to be extremely civil, and doing most wholeheartedly as she would be done by. "Please do not trouble to call on me if it would cause you the slightest inconvenience."

Mrs. Lovibond looked completely nonplussed.

"I would not think about my own pleasure in a matter which is obviously right," she remarked at length after a considerable silence.

Lady Blanche could hardly restrain her laughter at the ambiguity of the phrase.

"Please do not put yourself out," she uttered with some difficulty.

"I would not on any account fail in my duty," went on Mrs. Lovibond. "I should feel I had not testified as I should."

"I really don't think you need consider such a trifle anything so serious as duty," said Lady Blanche, reining in her amusement.

"Nothing is too trifling to be either right or wrong," observed Mrs. Lovibond rigidly. "Everything is either one or the other."

"That is as much as saying that everything in this world must be either black or white, and that there is no such thing as grey," said Florence Dommartin, speaking for the first time.

"And there certainly is grey, and several shades of it," added Lady Blanche, letting free her laugh at last. "There is French grey, and elephant grey, and——"

"That is a very worldly way of speaking," replied Mrs. Lovibond. "Miss Dommartin I expected it from. I know of old that she is not a Christian."

"Indeed!" said Lady Blanche, embarrassed. "But it is so fashionable nowadays for people to be Buddhists," she added hastily, catching at the first thing she could think of to relieve what she considered an awkward situation. "I can't

say I know anything about it, but they tell me it is the most scientifically probable of all the creeds——”

“Mrs. Charlesworth!” exclaimed Mrs. Lovibond in a commanding tone, “may I ask, are you a Christian yourself?”

“Yes, of course,” replied Blanche in a surprised voice. “Aren’t you?”

“Twice in an afternoon! twice in an afternoon!” cried Florence Dommartin, rocking herself backwards and forwards in an ecstasy as Mrs. Lovibond retreated in dudgeon. “Oh, I do wish Mrs. Gillespie had been here! She always says she longs to say things, and has not the nerve.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” said Lady Blanche.

“Oh, I mean the delightful snubs you have given Lady Ockerley and Mrs. Lovibond. I do wish Mrs. Gillespie had heard them!”

“Did I?” asked Blanche, distressed. “Oh, I am so sorry. I did not mean to. But why did Mrs. Lovibond ask such funny questions? And you know Lady Ockerley was really unkind to poor little Mrs. Cheswright. It was such a stupid thing to say.”

“So we all thought,” returned Florence, “but

only you dared say so. Oh, Mrs. Gillespie would say you were *impayable!*"

"Surely I did not say it was stupid?" exclaimed Blanche. "It would have been so rude. But I was angry, and I daresay one often speaks more sharply than one intends."

"I hope I shall be there when next you are angry," returned the impenitent Florence. "It was as good as a play to see their faces."

"I hope it will not happen again; the things which make me angry at the time always make me so much more sorrowful afterwards," said Blanche, in so quiet a voice that no one would have guessed how much she was really moved. Mrs. Cheswright's helpless face was before the eyes of her mind, and the impulse of all strong natures to act Providence was upon her. The voices talking round, and especially the cacophonous laugh of Mrs. Culloch, were suddenly out of tune with her mood. "I think I shall go home now," she said.


"Why, you have only just come," exclaimed Florence, astonished. "I wanted you to come and write down the names of some good novels in the order book. Oh, do! You really mustn't go until you have seen our library. It is full of gems of purest ray serene."

"I will come, then, with pleasure," said Blanche; "anywhere from this verandah," she mentally added. She was not a very great novel reader, but she remembered many of the titles in Lady Betty's last book box, and having the greatest reliance on her sister's taste assumed that the stories behind them were worth reading. She had not been in the library long when Mrs. Gillespie came in.

"I have an unerring instinct as to where you are to be found, Florence," remarked Mrs. Gillespie, in her characteristic tone of resuming a conversation instead of beginning one. "I am fortunate in finding Lady Blanche also." Her little nod and smile of greeting were, as Blanche unconsciously phrased it, "just right"; but then Henrica Gillespie was always appropriate.

"Oh, you dear, I must tell you!" cried Florence, and instantly poured out the histories of the two inimitable jests, as they were in her eyes, of the afternoon.

"I don't know why you think it funny," said Lady Blanche temperately, at the end of the first part. "I daresay I have a deficient sense of fun, but all I can see is that a not very sweet-tempered young woman was annoyed at what seemed to be an ill-natured remark and showed it. Beyond that I think it was simply a shame."



Mrs. Gillespie looked at her with her speculative eyes, smiling, and saying nothing.

"Oh, but hear the rest!" cried Florence, and rippled on.

"I am sure Mrs. Lovibond is the sort of woman who has no children," remarked Lady Blanche.

"Oh, but she has!" cried Florence. "A baby of five months, and I believe its name is Melchizedek, or something of that sort, and it is already settled it is to be a missionary."

"If it lives," added Mrs. Gillespie.

"Is it very delicate?" asked Blanche.

"Not that I know of. But I should think Mrs. Lovibond's way of bringing up babies was odd judging by the rest of her methods. She always has Christian ayahs, and in my experience Christian native servants are the worst you can get. Besides, it is always a case of 'if' with a child's life in this country."

"Is that really so?" asked Blanche, clouding over. "Not only Mrs. Cheswright's fancy?"

"No, it is really so. Children die here like flies, especially when they get a little older."

"I have a sort of idea that I have always heard that Anglo-Indian children are sent home to be brought up," said Lady Blanche. "But I saw several coming in the ship, so I thought it was not true. I suppose it is, and that is the reason."

"Yes—one of the reasons."

"It seems very hard on the mothers to have to part with their children."

"But what is a woman to do?" demanded Mrs. Gillespie. "Say she marries a man in the army, and he is ordered out to India, and she has children for whom she is afraid to risk the climate. She has to choose between them; she can't have both, as happier women do—as the Lord intended. Personally, I think a mother's first duty is to her children. She should not have them unless she is prepared to put them first and herself second. But it is *very* hard. Suppose you love a man, and he loves you? Must you give up the best life has to offer? All your happiness, all the mutual memories of all the years passed together? No love of the children can ever replace them, and the children may not grow up in the least grateful. Don't you see how hard it is? Besides, there are so many people who can't afford it. What are they to do?"

"I don't know," responded Blanche. "It is very dreadful. I didn't realise it before."

"I know you didn't. It is our side of the life of the army," replied Mrs. Gillespie. "That is what my husband means when he says soldiers ought not to be married men. No man can serve two masters. No woman can do her duty by her

children and follow the drum with her husband at the same time."

"Most women would know which to choose," volunteered Blanche.

"Do you think so? I am not so sure. It is a case of having to choose whether you will cut off your right hand or your left. Whichever you decide on, you will probably regret it afterwards."

"Then do you think that one could possibly care for a child more than for one's husband?" asked Blanche wistfully.

"I think that with all women worth the name it is a case of 'I could not love them, dear, so much, loved I not you more.' Or, rather, the more you care for the father the dearer the children must be."

Lady Blanche thought in silence for some minutes, fixing her eyes on the speaker. Mrs. Gillespie was also silent for a while, and then turned abruptly away.

"And there are good people at home," she said with a new note in her voice, "who think it wicked to deny one's self children. Good heavens! how little they know."

CHAPTER VII

DURING the first few weeks of her sojourn at Pultanpore, Lady Blanche did as the Pultanporians did. She went to the Club and listened to the band; to the polo ground and watched the game; to dinner and to picnics whenever she was asked. But she was not a success.

"She gives herself airs," said Lady Ockerley, with a Brixton toss of her flower-laden toque.

"She is a prude," said Mrs. Culloch, sprawling over her dinner-table in a dress cut to the very last limit which even British immodesty will stand.

"She cannot see any difference between me and the junior captain's wife," observed Mrs. Woolrich, preening ruffled feathers.

"She has got no fun in her," complained the young ladies of the station after a picnic, during which the youngest Miss Woolrich won a bet with two subalterns of the Highlanders that she could roll down a bank faster than they could,

and turn superior cartwheels on reaching the bottom.

As far as these critics' own point of view went, they were more or less right. Lady Blanche undoubtedly had *l'air de distinction*, though it was doubtful whether she had given it herself. She was not entertained by the type of woman whose conversation has to be carried on in whispers to the man next her. She did not admire the form of humour which induces young ladies to forget the dignity of womanhood. And she was totally unable to see the distinctions of rank which obtain in middle-class society.

Brown despises Jones because he makes by the sale of some necessary commodity some six times the income which Brown himself amasses in one of "the professions." Jones looks down on Robinson, who is a mere artist and gains his living by pandering to the public love of amusement. But the chances are that if Brown, Jones, and Robinson were all three introduced to the Duke of Sevendials, K.G., he would not be able to see the slightest difference between them. The same cuts the other way. To Brown, Jones, and Robinson, a countess is a great lady; to them my Lady Tomnoddy, who was married off the "halls" so long ago that the circumstance is forgotten save by persons with genealogical

memories, and her daughter, little Lady Violet Flybynights, who has been hovering *autour du divorce* for years, are as good or better than Lady Sangreazul, whose pedigree is from Charlemagne, and her life a model of the most old-fashioned virtues. They are all "ladies of title." What is the difference between them? And what, asks the Duke of Sevendials, K.G., is the difference between Brown, Jones, and Robinson, who all three make the word "girl" rhyme with "curl," and say: "Whatever made your lady friend get married?"

The truth is that the average person can really only focus on their own level.

Lady Blanche Charlesworth was unable to focus except from her own point of view. So without the faintest intention of so doing, she gave a great deal of offence. Worse still, she took none. The other ladies did things to her which, if they had been done to themselves, would have killed them with chagrin, and Lady Blanche never noticed them at all. They made a point of sending her down to dinner after Mrs. Cheswright, whose husband's promotion to captain was dated exactly five days after Bertram's, and she was actually seen during dinner smiling and talking unconcernedly to her neighbour.

Lady Ockerley was infuriated. She determined to *mettre les points sur les i*, and clinch the matter.

"I daresay you have noticed, Lady Charlesworth," she began, "that I am always sent into dinner before you. The fact is, it is due to my husband's position that I should be the Burra Mem here, so I got him to arrange it so before you arrived."

Lady Blanche opened her eyes wide.

"Oh, please," she said, "do not alter any arrangements for me. I do not care in the least where I go down to dinner."

This was just what annoyed Lady Ockerley. The young woman *ought* to have minded what was intended as a marked slight.

"I thought I would mention it in any case," went on Lady Ockerley, "as I was sure you must have noticed——"

"Oh, dear, no, I never did notice," returned Lady Blanche. "But please do not worry yourself about it, for it is not of the very slightest consequence."

Lady Ockerley nearly stamped.

"But it is of consequence!" she shouted. "It is the most important thing in society. Where would society be without rules?"

"I don't know, I am sure," returned Lady Blanche, as Lady Ockerley seemed to be expecting an answer. "But I don't suppose it really matters—not out here, anyway."


Lady Ockerley nearly had an apoplectic fit.

"It *does* matter!" she roared, when she recovered her breath. "It matters very much, as much out here as anywhere. It is of the greatest importance."

"Oh, do you think so?" said Lady Blanche, bored. "I always think the great advantage of being in the country or abroad like this is that one need not bother about nonsense."

The beauty of it was that a perfectly unconscious hand dealt this blow at Lady Ockerley's ideals. A few days afterwards, Bertram had occasion to apply for permission to attend a veterinary course, which had to go to the General for sanction. It was refused, and Bertram never could imagine why.

Mrs. Culloch never had the dear delight of sending someone down to dinner before Lady Blanche who obviously should not have gone, for the simple reason that Lady Blanche never dined with her. But that was not Mrs. Culloch's way of warfare. Her idea either of attack or retaliation was to strike her enemy through the



other sex. "To take away a man from another woman" was, as she frankly avowed, her greatest enjoyment. When any innocent affair which might possibly end in matrimony came within her sphere of influence, it was a point of honour—if the word may be so misapplied—with her to nip it in the bud; less innocent attachments met with equally small mercy, and it was her chief grievance that she was unable to detect either Lady Blanche or Mrs. Gillespie in one of these. To be sure, as she said to certain favoured confidantes, it proved their want of attractiveness, but (and this she kept to herself) it rendered them less vulnerable to her peculiar form of vengeance than she would have them be. However, a husband is better than nothing to take away from another woman, and failing opportunities with Hector Gillespie, she spread the snare of the fowler for Bertram Charlesworth.

Mrs. Lovibond generally exhibited displeasure with her fellow-creatures by holding prayer meetings with the express purpose of pointing out their shortcomings to the Almighty; but as she could not oblige her victims to be present, her vengeance would appear to fall somewhat short.

For that matter, so did all the ladies' ven-

geances as far as Lady Blanche was concerned. She did notice that her intercourse with them was not a success, but this chiefly because it failed to please herself. She was not self-conscious enough to be always thinking what impression she was making, nor had she sufficient knowledge of other circles than her own to know what they might be. She knew her own world pretty well. Observant people do learn something of the broad lines of human nature in *le grand monde*, but they are apt to take a bird's-eye view of them.

Little by little, for she felt that a sudden withdrawal would be a want of tact, Lady Blanche dropped out of the ways of Pultanpore. Bertram began to go to the various entertainments without her, and very gradually and insensibly their roads parted. The first ball that was given at the station after their arrival was the first milestone on this divided journey.

"Balls" at Pultanpore, as at other Indian stations, were so called to mark the fact of their taking place in the evening. "Dances" were affairs which took place in the afternoon, and for which the ladies showed enthusiasm which seemed extraordinary to Lady Blanche, whom nothing would have induced to dance by day-

light. This particular ball was given by the Lancers, by way of thanking the rest of the station for favours not yet received, or of celebrating their arrival—it was not clear which.

“It is sporting of the regiment to give a ball,” remarked the youngest Miss Woolrich, pulling galoshes like Noah’s ark in duplicate off her fairy extremities in the cloak-room. “But then, of course, the regiment *would* be sporting.”

“Hurry up, do!” admonished her sister Ethel, in an ill-modulated whisper; “the mater won’t go in till you’re ready, and I don’t want to miss the first dance.”

“You never do,” growled Gertrude, in her manly tones; “you’re a perfect glutton for dancing. Rotten sport, I call it.”

“You’re so selfish,” remarked Ethel in return.

“You’re so silly,” retorted Gertrude, without the temper which her sister began to display at once.

Lady Blanche came in at this moment, took off her cloak and, without a look at the glass, passed out again.

“Cleopatra on her needle,” remarked Gertrude with some classical vagueness.

“What do you mean?” asked Florence Dom-martin.

"I mean Lady Blanche," said Gertrude obscurely. "Did you see the way she came in and went out again? I hate people being so superior."

"So do I," added Ethel, agreeing with her sister for once.

Florence looked at them both and restrained a smile. Ethel had an extraordinary genius for looking tawdry, especially in the evening; her clothes always looked scrappy, and she had no carriage to improve the effect of an over-abundance of ornament. Gertrude invariably appeared to be dishevelled, even when freshly dressed; she always looked as if she had just been cooking the dinner before dressing.

"Some people always prefer to be queens of their company," remarked Florence Dommartin reflectively. The Miss Woolriches thought she meant Lady Blanche, and were serenely content.

"Doesn't everything look jolly?" inquired the whole-hearted Bertram, struggling into a pair of white gloves. He delighted in dancing.

"Yes," responded his wife a little dubiously. She happened to be gazing at Torquil MacLean, who stood in the doorway immediately opposite her. He did not look conspicuously jolly.

"There's that Captain MacLean," said the fair Gertrude's voice at her elbow. "Did you ever

see anybody who looked so stuck up? He gives himself more airs than anybody I ever knew."

"Perhaps he has something to give himself airs about," remarked Lady Blanche.

"No, of course he hasn't—he's only a junior captain."

"He's the best-looking man in the room by far," returned Lady Blanche.

"Do you think so?" retorted Gertrude. "I don't think he compares with Major Wimble."

Lady Blanche turned to contemplate the curled and oiled second-in-command of the Lancers, who was dancing at that moment with the speaker's sister, Ethel.

"Or your own husband," added Gertrude.

"Oh, no!" said Lady Blanche, laughing. "Bertram is very ordinary looking."

As she said it on the well-bred impulse of under-valuing a possession of her own, it suddenly struck her that it was true. Bertram's face was not a shade superior in any way, either from intellect, breeding, or anything but the sheer comeliness of health and freshness, to the other faces round him. He harmonised with his surroundings. The fact that he did so abruptly brought it home to Lady Blanche that she did not.

Colonel Woolrich thought that he ought to

amuse "her ladyship," as he invariably called her. When she turned from looking at the gyrating dancers, she found him beside her.

"This is the first time you have seen us in our glory," he remarked. "Pretty sight, eh?"

"Yes," returned Lady Blanche. "Uniforms are certainly very becoming, and do make a ball look very gay. The Highland uniform is particularly embellishing," she added, with her eyes on the Colonel of the Highland regiment.

This gentleman, in his ordinary attire, was by no means conspicuous for beauty or refinement. He had attained fame by means of a story which credited him with having plunged into a battle with an epigram of the nature of "Up Guards, and at them!" on his lips. But what he really said on the occasion was, "On, on, my braves! I myself will follow with the reserve ammunition!" He was not nice, and it is unnecessary to obtrude him into this chronicle more than is avoidable.

"Come, come, I can't allow the Highland uniform is a patch on ours!" exclaimed Colonel Woolrich. "You mustn't run down your own regiment. Deuced ridiculous, I always think, to see all these Englishmen figurin' about in kilts."

It was fortunate that Lady Blanche had been

warned that one of Colonel Woolrich's preconceived and unalterable notions was that the Highland officers were of exclusively Southern extraction, however Caledonian their appellations might be.

"Don't you remember," he went on in spite of her discreet silence, "how, when the linked battalion system came into force, one battalion which had been made into a kilted one was quartered at Portsmouth, and they called 'em the Southsea Islanders?"

"How funny!" said Lady Blanche, laughing in her ignorance of this very antiquated joke.

Colonel Woolrich swelled with pride at the *succès* he was achieving.

"I can tell you another good story," he went on with absolute irrelevance. "There was a person, an army chaplain, that everybody hated all over India, who went on some expedition or other, I think it was. His native servant was cleanin' his revolver outside his tent one evenin', and it went off and blew a hole through the *padre*. When they brought him down to Rawl Pindi and buried him, they stuck up a cross over his grave, and on it was: 'The Rev. So-and-So. Shot accidentally by his bearer, such and such a year,' and at the foot, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant.'"

And this being his favourite story, Colonel Woolrich became so hysterical during the telling of it that it was only to be followed with difficulty.

His mirth had scarcely subsided when the dance came to an end, and Lady Blanche was divided from him by a stream of people leaving the room. At the end of this exodus she found herself part of a group of which the other component parts were Torquil MacLean and the Gillespies.

"I congratulate you," she heard Captain Gillespie saying; "you have got a good let off this time."

"If you think you are strong enough for it," added his wife.

"Sir Charles Sursock, who was an old friend of my father's, has written to tell me that he has applied for me to go on his staff to this little side show we are having in Somaliland," Torquil explained to Lady Blanche's inquiring eyes.

"And you will like that?"

"I shall like it very much. It is always a pleasant thing to go on the staff, and I shall be glad to get away from here."

"Complimentary to us, isn't it?" said Captain Gillespie, laughing.

"The compliment was intended for another quarter," returned his friend with a smile.

"Have they," asked Mrs. Gillespie in a guarded voice, "been specially obnoxious of late?"

"Well, no, I can't say they have, though they meant to be. Their displeasure shows itself chiefly in letting me severely alone."

"Oh," said Mrs. Gillespie in a tone of relief, "if that is all——"

"It is not quite all. I have to be always on the look-out to make no mistakes, as that is what I know they are waiting for to be down on me."

"That," pronounced Captain Gillespie, "is good for the soul, my boy. It keeps you up to the mark."

"All very well for one's self. But if you happen to be inflicted—no doubt purposely—with a particularly stupid subaltern——"

"Oh, subalterns are the curse of the army. They are either too stupid, when they are a nuisance to their friends; or too clever, when they are a nuisance to themselves," opined Hector Gillespie. "By the way, I see you have a new youngster?"

"Yes; I was just going to ask leave to introduce him to you, Lady Blanche. He seems rather a fish out of water."

"Do," said Lady Blanche. "Though I don't

promise to be able to restore him to his native element. What is his name?"

"MacKenzie. His father is MacKenzie of Eileandoran, whom I daresay you have heard of; at least, we Scotch people always fancy our great chieftains must be as celebrated elsewhere as they are with us."

"Of course I know the name," said Lady Blanche, "but I don't think I have ever met any of them."

"No, I fancy they are very feudal, and never leave their ancestral mountains. Then I may fetch him over? After which I shall say good-night and be off. I suppose having contributed the dignity of my presence to this entertainment, I shall have satisfied all the demands of society."

"Hardly," said Mrs. Gillespie. "But then it is of no use to try and content many-mouthed monsters of this description. You will be well out of it all in Somaliland. For his sake I am glad," she added to Lady Blanche, as Torquil swung away, "but for mine I am sorry, as one cannot afford to lose a congenial spirit."

"Life," remarked Captain Gillespie, "would be dreadfully restricted if one was tied down to what one could afford."

"What a pretty woman Mrs. Puam is!" observed Blanche presently, watching the valsers.

"Isn't she? And you cannot imagine how much prettier she is when she is dressed like a regular Irish colleen, with her hair tumbled about her shoulders and a short ragged skirt. She was in some tableaux just before you came as Kathleen Mavourneen, and she was a perfect picture," said Mrs. Gillespie. "She ought always to be dressed like that. The sort of clothes she has on now spoil her."

"But I suppose that would scarcely do," said Lady Blanche rather literally.

"It would not suit her present ideas, certainly," replied Mrs. Gillespie, laughing. "She has a charming taste in dress—for anybody else."

"Are you saying something nasty about somebody's clothes?" inquired Miss Ockerley, who came up in time to catch the last sentence.

"I was under the impression that it was something nice," replied Mrs. Gillespie; "but it is now sure to reach the object as something vitriolic," she added, as Miss Ockerley passed on. "Well, Lady Blanche, now for a question I have had in reserve for you a long time. How does India strike you?"

"I think I have had enough of it," returned Blanche promptly.

"So soon! Oh, poor woman! and you have scarcely seen it at all. Is not this your first Anglo-Indian ball?"

"I think it will be my last."

"Oh, come," said Mrs. Gillespie, "don't take it like that. I don't care for it at all myself, but I manage to get a laugh out of it sometimes. It is all part of the play."

"I imagined it different, I think," said Lady Blanche. "I never thought there would be so many people, or that one would be obliged—almost against one's will—to see so much of them. I expected to be more alone, somehow."

"You expected the Garden of Eden," said Mrs. Gillespie, hitting the nail more fairly than she knew, "and you only found Vanity Fair. But you know we never get all the conditions again, for if we attain the garden, Adam is lacking, and *vice versa*. And there is always the serpent in the garden."

"No," said Lady Blanche, smiling. "I am afraid the garden was swept away by the Flood."

"Well, then, you must try and find the top of Ararat instead as a substitute," laughed Mrs. Gillespie.

"I wish I could, it sounds so nice and isolated."

"Rather cold, I fancy! Yes, Hector, I will

come to supper ; and I will say good-night, Lady Blanche, for I am not going to stay long. I am chaperoning Florence, and I am sure she ought to be torn away soon."

Lady Blanche had been dancing with Mr. MacKenzie and Captain Cheswright, and in a stately square dance, which was supposed to be a quadrille, but in which everybody wandered to and fro at his or her own sweet will, with Sir Arthur Ockerley. She had not seen Bertram since the beginning of the ball, and she was just thinking of looking for him when she paused by a window looking on to the verandah.

"I think it is getting very marked," said the voice of Mrs. Woolrich in the darkness.

"It is a great shame for his poor wife," added the tearful accents of Mrs. Cheswright.

"It is all the more curious," went on Mrs. Woolrich, "because he never went on with any lady in ours before, not even Mrs. Eden, and we all know, my dear, what *she* is with the men."

"She is not quite so—what shall I call it—audacious as Mrs. Culloch," suggested Mrs. Cheswright.

"It is extraordinary to me why women care for these flirtations," said Mrs. Woolrich. "*I* never looked at anyone but my husband when *I*

was a young married woman, more especially not another woman's husband."

"That is the chief pleasure to them, I do believe," quavered Mrs. Cheswright.

"Very shocking behaviour indeed!" pronounced Mrs. Woolrich. "I only hope there will be no scandal, for it would be very unpleasant to have a scandal in ours."

"Do you suppose she—his wife—knows?" faltered Mrs. Cheswright.

"Oh, dear, no! I am sure she does not; and I rather think somebody ought to tell her."

"Oh, dear, I should not like to be that somebody!" cried Mrs. Cheswright in tones of terror.

"I am thinking whether as Colonel's wife, and, as you might say, standing almost in the relation of a mother to all you young people," went on Mrs. Woolrich with relish, "that perhaps it might be my duty. Not that I think I have met with the respect which is my due from her."

"Oh, could you dare?" breathed Mrs. Cheswright.

"I could," said Mrs. Woolrich proudly, speaking in capitals, "dare Anything in Pursuit of my Duty. But I am not sure in this case what my duty is. One never likes to interfere between husband and wife, even when the husband is

behaving so very ill. I think we shall have to be guided by circumstances."

Lady Blanche could not help overhearing this dialogue. She did not, however, listen with any attention, as she had no idea what the ladies were talking about, nor did she care.

CHAPTER VIII

DONALD MACKENZIE, younger of Eileandoran, had been brought up to think Scotland the first of countries, and his chieftain father the first man in it. At the ancient West Highland stronghold, where he was born and bred, gold was less plentiful than ancestors; but the family would rather have died than transmute any of their ancient possessions into that base metal. The heir had been reared on oatmeal and in homespun, and was told that frugality and hardiness became an ancient race. It was only when he was old enough to go to a public school that Eileandoran, for the first time in his life, let part of his leagues of deer forest to a *nouveau riche* (who complained bitterly of the rudeness of the lodge, and declared it scarcely to balance the superiority of the "heads" he obtained). This was a concession to the Philistines, and Eileandoran made it stiffneckedly, but his son must see the world, he said, even at this cost. Donald saw very little of the world at Eton, for the natural

outcome of his upbringing was that he chose his friends for their "lang pedigrees" rather than for any other qualifications.

They would have been indignant if they were told so, but the attitude of the family mind was Confucian. Like the Chinese, they worshipped ancestors. It is a respectable belief if only from its antiquity, but it is not exactly practical in the West, except for millionaires.

Donald grew up a credit to the tough old race which produced him, at any rate outwardly. He was of Scandinavian rather than Celtic type, standing, like "Norman Rou," "taller by the head" than any of his acquaintance. Though he could swell the biceps in his raised arm almost to the size of a slim girl's waist, he could very nearly have worn her glove. For the rest, he had the deep chest and lean hips of the type, and a face that women called ugly and men handsome. He was the kind of young man who has a cold tub every morning, and who thinks that all women are angels.


Because the MacKenzies of Eileandoran had almost always figured as food for the ravens in the cheerful prophecies of Highland seers, they deemed no profession save that of arms worthy of their attention. Eileandoran himself, it is true, had always been a civilian, but that was owing to

delicate health in youth ; he had no brothers, but he had two sons, and he determined that they should follow the paths of their ancestors (though not necessarily in the direction of the ravens), which to himself had been closed by the mysterious dispensations of Providence. What more suitable for these descendants of kings than to adorn their territorial regiment ?

Donald chiefly boxed, fenced, and high-jumped his way into the army, having only the minimum of book-knowledge necessary to scrape through examinations at the bottom of the list. He was fortunate in being only eighteen the year after the war began, so that the comparatively small number of marks he made in passing out of Sandhurst was yet no bar to his joining a regiment which had been seriously depleted of officers, though it was at other times difficult of attainment.

Donald came out to join at Pultnapore in December, 1901. He came hoping that he would prove a stormy petrel, that war would instantly break out in Thibet or elsewhere, and that his ill-luck in having missed the war in South Africa would thereby be cancelled. Wars and rumours of wars loomed so very large in his mind that he thought of nothing smaller.

He knew so little about the present state of his regiment that he was actually surprised his first



night at mess at hearing nothing but English spoken. He had been told that a hundred years ago the officers were all Gaelic-speaking, turning with ease to the older tongue for the benefit of a distinguished stranger, and what more distinguished stranger could they have at their board than young Eileandoran? Some unknown words he caught, and pricked up his ears, but he quickly gathered that they were Hindustani.

If ignorant of common things, he had a good deal of out-of-the-way knowledge. Eileandoran was a walking encyclopedia of genealogy, heraldry and woodcraft. When Donald heard the names of his brother officers, his first question was: "Of what family of the (MacCorquodales, MacLeans, Campbells, or whichever the name was) is he?" He was puzzled that there were a good many names he could not identify. "What is his father?" he asked on meeting one of these. Both his questions were commonly left unanswered. Not many of his brother officers had grandfathers, it appeared, and even their fathers seemed slightly uncertain. Donald thought it seemed very odd to hear "a Glasgow merchant," "a W.S. in Edinburgh," or "a whisky distiller in Aberdeen" mentioned as progenitors of his associates. His only reply, however, was "Oh!" and he was careful that it should not be expressive.

● There was another subaltern who joined the same week as Donald, called Hodgkins. ("I do not think I know the name," said Donald very courteously.) He was very shy, uncertain what he should do, and unhappy in consequence. He watched his brother officers with the anxious face of a rabbit in a trap. It was pitiful to see his trepidation lest he should offend. It was, of course, an inevitable consequence that he did offend, and that instantly.

"Hodgkins," said the Senior Subaltern, "you can't wear those trews here. They are not the right pattern."

Poor Hodgkins gazed at his legs in dismay.

"I haven't got any other sort," he stammered.

"Then you must order three pairs out from England at once. I give you until they come to wear those, and then you must never show yourself in them again."

"But—but they're quite new!" cried Hodgkins in consternation.

"I don't care. They're not right."

Donald watched this scene with widening eyes; he saw that the price of the despised garments was trembling on the unfortunate Hodgkins' lips, and that it was appalling his soul. Luckily it did not burst forth, and the Senior Subaltern wheeled round.

"What about your trews, MacKenzie? They aren't as bad as Hodgkins', but they don't look right, somehow. Did you get them at Goose and Goldlace's?"

"No," said Donald; "they came from Snippets and Remnants'."

"Ah! I thought there was something wrong about them. Well, you will order three more pairs by the same mail as Hodgkins."

"I think not," said Donald very gently.

The Senior Subaltern stared.

"But I tell you you have got to."

"I think not," repeated Donald, with just a shade more emphasis on the negative.

"Then we'll soon make them so as you'll have to. Come on, boys, let's pull them off him. We'll soon see if they are made of stuff that'll tear or not."

Three subalterns made a prancing advance. Donald leant over a small table between himself and the Senior Subaltern.

"Are you going to do that?" he asked very gently.

"Just ain't we!" clamoured the three.

Donald's under jaw projected slightly.

"I shall be sorry for you if you try anything like that on me," he said.

The remark was received with jeers. The

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Senior Subaltern added strong language, and kicked the table out of the way. Donald straightened himself, and there was a light in his eyes like that which shone in the faces of his Viking forefathers at the sight of blood.

“Come along !” he said.

They came. They came very fast, one on each side. Donald caught the right hand one in one hand, and threw him to one end of the room ; the left hand one with the other, and hurled him to the other ; and then rushed upon the Senior Subaltern. There was a frightful crash of glass as the right hand subaltern fell through the glass door on to the verandah as if he had been shot out of a gun. There was a reverberation as of a thunderstorm as the left hand one came to the ground amid a mass of overturned furniture. There was a shock as of earthquake resounding through the room at the impact of Donald’s fist on the teeth of the Senior Subaltern, who sat down precipitately. The two other subalterns present, one being Mr. Hodgkins, showed the better part of valour and fled.

It happened that the next day was commanding officer’s parade. Three officers were absent, which caused the Colonel to break out in his habitual language, which was foul. He ascertained that one was in hospital with a broken arm ; the second

had been very sick for several hours, and did not seem able to walk; and the third applied for leave to go and consult a dentist. The Colonel asked for explanations; and on receiving them he used more foul language, not relevant to the point. He spoke to Donald in terms which that young man had never heard applied to himself before, and at which he was amazed beyond all power of speech. The Colonel observed that the sufferers were in the right, and that Donald was in the wrong; that such things might not be, and that Donald should not be granted leave for three months; and he embellished these unpalatable suggestions with personal remarks of an offensive description.

But Donald had established a reign of terror, and no one ever attempted on him the amiable coercions under which he daily saw Mr. Hodgkins and such weaker vessels labouring. The chief outcome of the affair was, however, unforeseen by them. Torquil MacLean's application to go on active service was refused.

"I am short of officers," alleged the Colonel. It was, unfortunately, impossible to mention that several were on leave at the time. The excuse came at an opportune moment, and was welcome.

Personal encounters with Mr. MacKenzie, it was hereby established, were things to be avoided

with all circumspection. The minds of his brother officers were, however, so much obsessed by the idea that his trews were undesirable, that they took the opportunity of his being out to go into his bungalow and possess themselves of those articles of apparel. Perhaps some traitor or some occult system of mental telegraphy warned Donald, perhaps he only came back for something forgotten, but the hated garments were actually in course of being thrust into the fire when their owner's heavy tread was heard in the verandah outside. There was a general stampede—doors and windows were alike congested—and above a considerable din Mr. Hodgkins' voice was heard wailing :

“Don't hit me, MacKenzie ! I swear it wasn't my doing. On my sacred word of honour I never touched your beastly trews. Don't hit me, there's a good chap.”

The verandah was now full of breathless fugitives, and in the midst on his threshold stood the rock-like figure of Donald, breathing rather hard through his nostrils, and with a by no means ingratiating expression on his face. It took him some minutes to discover what had really happened, and when he did so, his first care was economically to rescue the remains of his trews from destruction. By the time he had spread

them out on the floor to discover the extent of the damage, the verandah was empty.

He talked to himself as he inspected, and his remarks were not of a kind calculated to encourage further aggressions. The windows of his room were open, and some of his violent expressions reached the verandah and the ears of the passing Captain MacLean.

"Anything happened?" inquired the latter, looking in.

The face with which Donald looked up was really rather alarming until he saw that it was not one of his enemies, but one of those officers who shared the bungalow. He explained what had happened.

"They will be sorry for it before they are much older," he finished.

"How?" asked Torquil, rather amused. "You say you didn't see which they were. You can't thrash the whole regiment."

"Do you think not?" asked Donald, in the very gentle voice which he invariably assumed when most dangerous.

"I quite think you're able and willing," returned Torquil, "but it would take such a time."

Donald considered this point.

"I don't see why I should allow this to pass

unnoticed," he remarked with a certain stiff formality of his own.

"I think you had better," advised Torquil; "it is nothing unusual, you know. We all have to go through it."

"Go through what?"

"Why, a certain amount of ragging from the other subalterns. I could tell you of no end of things they did to me when I joined. They couldn't stand any of my clothes, and I had to buy an entire new outfit in the first few weeks."

"A new outfit," remarked Donald incontrovertibly, "costs a great deal of money."

"It does. But when it is a choice between buying it and being ragged——"

"I could not ask my father for any new things, and I shall punch anybody's head who tries to rag me."

"Well, well, don't look so savage," said Torquil, smiling. "I daresay they won't attempt it. Grand thing to be able to hit like the kick of a horse! I wish I could."

Donald was still thinking about the expense to which Torquil had been put.

"But why did you put up with it?" he asked, with very wide eyes. "You must have been very well off. I am not well off; we have never been at Eileandoran."

"I would not say so here if I were you," advised Torquil.

"Why not? It is nothing to be ashamed of," said Donald proudly.

"It will make you very unpopular if you can't do like the others."

Donald pondered this.

"I am not sure that I wish to do like the others," he pronounced at length. "I hoped to fight. But as I can't do that, I would rather shoot than anything. I can't play polo, for I am so heavy; I hate lawn tennis, it is such a feeble game; and I don't care for any of their society nonsense. I want to shoot, and I can afford to do that. I don't care about being unpopular. It does not strike me that most of these fellows are what I call gentlemen, and I don't care what that sort of person thinks of me."

"Still, as you have got to live in the regiment, you had better take it as you find it," argued Torquil.

"Does that mean that I am to put up with anything anybody may choose to say or do?" asked Donald.

He was sitting on the floor by the remains of his trews during this conversation, and Torquil was leaning against the mantelpiece. "Thank

you, but I think I would rather be unpopular than be interfered with."

"They soon leave off if you don't lose your temper," asserted Torquil.

"They leave off at once—with me," said Donald grimly.

"They don't mean any harm. Everybody has to go through it, and it does most fellows good. Lots of young fellows who come to us need licking into shape——"

This was an unfortunate speech. Torquil was certainly not a diplomatist.

"Captain MacLean," said Donald stiffly, "I was born, bred, and educated as a gentleman. I came here to be taught my drill. I did not come to be taught how to behave myself."

Torquil began hastily—

"Some fellows have to go through no end, you know. Our present Colonel, for instance. There was nothing left undone to make him leave the regiment. Everything he had was damaged or destroyed; all his kit was packed up once a week and put in the barrack square labelled 'To Hell'; they ducked him, and they thrashed him from morning till night——"

"I think it was very plucky of him to stay," remarked Donald.

"Well, yes, I suppose it was," returned Torquil,

for once admitting some merit in his enemy. "But that shows you what some fellows have to go through who are not lucky enough to be the big fellow you are."

"I don't make it out at all," said Donald, with a deep pucker between his eyes. "Of course it is perfectly optional to dislike anybody. But one does not always show it—not, at any rate, after one is grown up. One simply avoids the people one does not like."

"You can't very well in a regiment," observed Torquil.

"There are not many games that two can't play at," remarked Donald, with ominous quietness.

"I'm of opinion that not many of them will care to play with you much more," replied Torquil, smiling.

"I hope not," said Donald, getting up. "People mostly get hurt when they play with me."

He stretched himself very slowly, much as a tiger stretches itself in its cage at the Zoo. He certainly was a very dangerous-looking young man.

"Solly must wish he was a boxer," remarked Hector Gillespie when he heard of these occurrences, for they, of course, became the talk of Pultnapore at once.

Mr. Solly was a Lancer subaltern who was

never out of trouble, and who was popularly supposed to have been the chief performer in more of the farcical comedies known as "sub-alterns' courts-martial" than any other officer of his length of service.

Some of the ladies would have liked to make a lion of Donald MacKenzie, but they had no opportunity of doing so. With the exception of that one ball when he had danced with Lady Blanche, he avoided society like the plague. His only appearances in public were at cricket matches, where he played with characteristic whole-souledness and violence.

"You have never called on me, Mr. MacKenzie," Mrs. Culloch introduced herself to him for the purpose of saying.

"I am sorry," said Donald, with his old-fashioned bow, "but I have never seen a box for cards on your gate."

Mrs. Culloch, worsted for the first time in her life, retreated in disorder, and ever afterwards spoke of Donald as "that objectionable young man."

CHAPTER IX

"IF you please, my lady," said Jennings, Lady Blanche's maid, shortly after Christmas, "I wish to leave your service."

Lady Blanche, who was having her hair brushed, looked up with astonishment and a little consternation. The maid was a Heribert girl, the daughter of one of the farmers, and she was like a little bit of home to her mistress. A little bit of Heribert, in these very dissimilar surroundings, was not to be lightly foregone. Even Bertram knew little about that beloved country compared with the girl who was born there. Besides, an English maid is almost impossible to replace in India.

"Must you really?" Lady Blanche asked.

"Have you anything to complain of?"

"No, my lady, nothing at all. It is not that."

"You don't want to go to somebody else?"

"Not exactly, my lady. At least—the truth is, I am going to be married."

"What, immediately?" asked Blanche, who

knew that Jennings had not been engaged when she arrived in India, and that engagements in her class were not followed instantly by marriage.

"Yes, my lady, in about six weeks' time."

"Well, I can only hope you will be happy," said Blanche, resigning herself with a sigh. "I suppose you are going to marry the Regimental Sergeant-Major?"

The Regimental Sergeant-Major of the Lancers was a particularly smart and beautiful personage.

"No, my lady. It is Captain MacGusty, in the Highlanders."

Jennings spoke in an important voice.

"Oh, indeed!" said Lady Blanche, rather amused. She would have liked to ask where her maid had met the individual mentioned, but thought it would be a tactless question. Jennings, she thought, was an exceedingly nice-looking young woman; she was always well and quietly dressed, and had nicely-kept hair and hands. She would pass muster among most of the regimental ladies.

"There is only one thing I would ask of your ladyship," went on Jennings, in a respectful tone.

"Yes?"

"Captain MacGusty has arranged that we should go down to Bombay to be married. He

wishes it to appear as if I had just come out from England, and he—I—should be very much obliged if your ladyship—and the Captain too” (she meant Bertram) “would not mention to the other ladies that you knew me, or——”

Poor Jennings blushed and stammered a good deal over her request, and Blanche, seeing this, came good-naturedly to her rescue.

“Oh, of course! You may count on Captain Charlesworth and me; we will certainly not betray you.”

“Thank you, my lady,” said Jennings, subsiding into her usual quiet demeanour. She was too well-bred a servant to have her head turned, even by this important event. She had been brought up within sight of Heribert Abbey; compared with that, the ancestral halls of Captain MacGusty (which were contained by a shipping merchant’s house in Glasgow) did not seem so dazzling.

“I knew you would lose her,” remarked Bertram; “no one ever keeps a maid in India. They always marry at once. I suppose she is going to marry a sergeant.”

“Just what I thought! I imagined no maid could have resisted your Regimental Sergeant-Major. But it seems she soars to the commissioned ranks.”

"What! not going to marry one of those asses of subalterns?" cried Bertram. "He'll have to leave! Gillespie will never let him stay."

"No, it is Captain MacGusty."

"Ah, well, then it is not our affair," remarked Bertram, cooling down. "But rather a joke, isn't it? Won't it make a talk!"

"It might—if it got about. But unless you or I speak of it, it will not; and I have engaged for both of us that it shall not."

"But is that quite fair to the other ladies," asked Bertram, "to let them associate with her without knowing?"

"Her character is quite above reproach. It can't hurt them to know her," returned Lady Blanche. "If they heard she was a servant they might refuse to have anything to do with her, and I think that would be hard, for she is quite as good as some of them."

"Oh, come now!" expostulated Bertram, "she's not a lady, after all."

"Really, Bertie," said Blanche innocently. "I think she is quite as presentable as Mrs. Culloch."

"Mrs. Culloch is a very charming woman," said Bertram, getting very red. "I will thank you not to discuss her."

Lady Blanche looked up in amaze. But she dropped the subject.

"You will promise not to speak of it, though?" she said, referring to Jennings' request; and Bertram, with a bad grace, promised.

It was not very long after this that the *esclandre* about Mrs. Puam took place. Lady Blanche and the Gillespies dined one night with Torquil MacLean at the Club and played bridge to a somewhat late hour. It was a very fine night, and Captain Gillespie suggested that they should all walk home, dropping Lady Blanche at her own bungalow on the way. They were talking and laughing as they walked—absolutely without a thought of anything more serious than their respective fortunes at the game they had been playing. They crossed the Mall and turned up the side road which led towards the church. The first bungalow on their left-hand side was Mrs. Culloch's, and as they passed it a figure rushed wildly out of the gate. It was Mrs. Puam in evening dress, without a cloak, her hair wild, her eyes streaming with tears.

This alarming apparition brought Lady Blanche and Captain Gillespie, who were walking first, to a dead stop.

"What in the world is the matter?" ejaculated Blanche.

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, take pity on me! Take me with you and put me up for the night," cried Mrs. Puam hysterically. "I went there"—pointing back at the bungalow. "I thought for sure Gladys Culloch would take me in. She was my friend! She won't! She showed me the door! If she won't have me, who will? She's no better than I am——"

"My dear Mrs. Puam," said Hector Gillespie, stepping forward and speaking decidedly, "we do not in the least understand what is the matter. Are you burnt out of your house and home? Because, if so, I am sure we shall be delighted to be of any assistance possible. I am exceedingly sorry——"

"Oh, it's not burnt out, I am!" said Mrs. Puam. "I wish I was! Brian has turned me out of the house!"

"Her husband," whispered Mrs. Gillespie to Lady Blanche, and she came forward to the somewhat bewildered Captain Gillespie's rescue. "This will not do, Hector," she said in a low voice. "I see Mrs. Culloch has got a dinner party——"

"I know she has, for my husband is at it," said Blanche.

"It will never do for some of them to come out and find this going on. Let us get the poor

woman away. Your house," turning to Lady Blanche, "is nearest. You don't mind?" and going forward she addressed Mrs. Puam in her clear, steady voice—

"Come along with us, then. We are taking Lady Blanche home, and I have no doubt she can give you a bed."

"God bless you!" sobbed Mrs. Puam.

"Not at all," returned Mrs. Gillespie, rather hastily and ambiguously. "Let us go there as quickly as we can."

The Charlesworths' bungalow was at no great distance, and the party walked there without loss of time.

Mrs. Gillespie led the way with Mrs. Puam, and Lady Blanche, imperfectly comprehending the whole affair, and Captain Gillespie, in some consternation, brought up the rear.

"Now," said Mrs. Gillespie as she reached the bungalow, "come and tell us all about it."

Hector Gillespie, with rare tact, drew back and left the ladies alone. Mrs. Puam, looking prettier than ever in her dishevelment, stood in the middle of the drawing-room with her hands clasped dramatically. The other two sat down, Blanche still bewildered, Mrs. Gillespie alert and business-like.

"Isn't it a cruel thing to happen to a poor

woman?" cried Mrs. Puam. "If it had been in the daytime now! But he only arrived to-night from the hills. I wasn't expecting him, and the first thing he says, 'Go—go away out of my house—don't let me ever see you again!' Not a thing would he let me take! Just as I was he drove me out! And what could I do?"

"He must be mad," exclaimed Blanche, and Mrs. Puam caught at the words.

"That's it! Just mad! He doesn't know what he is doing. He was never like this before."

"Was he quite—sober?" asked Mrs. Gillespie with some hesitation.

"Oh, Brian was never the boy for drink. But oh, why couldn't he have waited till the morning?" moaned Mrs. Puam. "To put the black shame on me before all the station like this!"

She sank into a chair and rocked herself to and fro, beating her knees. At every word she became more colloquial and the veneer of civilisation wore thinner.

"I am very sorry. It is a great shame," said Mrs. Gillespie. "If I can do anything to help you, I will. If you like I will go and see Dr. Puam in the morning and try to reason with him, though I don't suppose it will be any use."

"Oh, do see him! Do tell him how cruel it is!" cried Mrs. Puam eagerly. "I never thought it

of you, I didn't ! I never thought you would be so kind ! Just look how Gladys Culloch treated me, and she and I were so thick ! Oh, it is an angel you are, for sure ! ”

“Not that I am aware of,” said Mrs. Gillespie a little coolly ; “but I will do what I can for you, because from your account Dr. Puam has behaved ill to you. He might at least have spared a scandal.”

“Yes, and when I have done nothing more than usual, too,” cried Mrs. Puam.

It did not seem to strike her that there was anything ambiguous in this exclamation, but so it struck both the other women, and their delicacy prompted them both to avoid looking at each other.

“Well,” advised Mrs. Gillespie, “I would not disturb myself too much about it all. Perhaps it will all come right. Dr. Puam may have acted in the heat of the moment, and be sorry for it when he cools down.”

“Oh, but I am the marked woman !” cried Mrs. Puam with a fresh burst of hysterical lamentation. “I shall never be able to show my face in Pultanpore again !”

“There are other places besides Pultanpore,” suggested Lady Blanche.

“Oh, you must try and hope for the best,”

began Mrs. Gillespie. She was interrupted by Bertram's voice at the door.

"Blanche, are you there? Can you speak to me for a moment?" and then there was a murmuring of voices.

In a few minutes Lady Blanche returned.

"Mrs. Gillespie," she said in a low voice, "my husband says he does not wish Mrs. Puam to stay here. Will you take her with you?"

"Is he on the verandah?" asked Mrs. Gillespie, "and Hector, too? Let me come out."

This is what Bertram would fain have avoided, as he was in fear of an encounter with Mrs. Gillespie, in which he anticipated that he would come off the worse.

"Hector," said Mrs. Gillespie, not noticing him, "have you any objection to our taking that wretched woman back with us?"

"Not in the least, if you wish it."

"We will contrive somehow for her." The Gillespies' bungalow was a smaller one than the Charlesworths'. "It will not be for long. She must have some people somewhere nearer than Ireland, surely."

"I know you think I am a brute, Mrs. Gillespie," cut in Bertram nervously. "But, you see, the woman came to Mrs. Culloch's and blurted it all out in the middle of us all, and after such a

scandal you can't expect me to like my wife con-sorting with her——”

“My dear Captain Charlesworth, please do not excuse yourself,” said Henrica Gillespie, her eye-brows raised in those fine arches. “I am not at all the person to judge of your actions or to ask explanations of them, and I can assure you nothing was further from my thoughts. Then shall we start now, Hector?” turning back to her husband. “It is getting very late.”

She went back into the drawing-room and told Mrs. Puam of the new arrangement.

“Take my cloak,” said Lady Blanche to Mrs. Puam.

She was vaguely sorry for her, and wished to show her sympathy in some way. It was the kind of case which was quite outside her experience and she did not know what to say.

Captain Gillespie and Mrs. Puam walked out of the Charlesworths' compound first; Mrs. Gillespie was following when Bertram intercepted her.

“Now, Mrs. Gillespie,” he said in a semi-confidential tone, “you don't blame me, hang it all?”

“By no means,” returned Mrs. Gillespie with that smooth politeness which is more deadly than invective or insult; “it must be nice to be so

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immaculate that one can blame people for anything they do."

With which double-edged remark she left him muttering to himself: "I always knew that woman had a tongue."

He contented himself, however, with this soliloquy, and did not do anything to prevent Lady Blanche from going up the next day to hear what was the next move in this ill-regulated game.

Of course, the next morning the news was all over the station. Dr. Puam was interviewed by Mrs. Gillespie according to her promise, and, following her expectation, he proved implacable. He was a fiery-red Irishman with a tangled beard, and he looked like a passionate goat as he declared with much brogue that he would divorce his wife.

"Are you quite sure you can?" asked Mrs. Gillespie calmly.

"I can, madam. I could have divorced her a hundred times and I forebore. This is the hundred-and-first, and it is too much."

"But I cannot make out that that is so," said Mrs. Gillespie. "Hector says he has been *le mari complaisant* too long; and besides, there has not been anybody particular since that Russian man went away."

"No; but does that matter?" asked Blanche.

"The length of time, I mean. I don't know anything about divorces, but the scandal always seems to have taken place ages before the actual case."

"Of course you know," said Mrs. Gillespie after a pause, "I hold the Catholic view about divorce. Still, if people believe in it, I see no reason why they should not get it, provided they don't marry again. But in this particular case I think it is a great shame. Doctor Puam had left her here all alone, often for months at a time, and he must have known that there was talk about her. It was obvious to the most unobservant that the poor woman was a flirt, and that she had dresses and other things beyond what she could honestly afford. She was in a position of great temptation, and he must have known it. Yet he leaves her to do exactly as she likes, and I am not denying that there is no doubt what she liked was not always quite innocent; and then he suddenly pounces down on her like this without a moment's warning, and makes a scandal."

"Perhaps he had warned her, only we knew nothing about it," suggested Blanche.

"No, he had not. She says he had not, and he admitted it himself to-day when I asked him. Hector thinks there is something behind it. He

thinks that there must be another woman in the case."

"And that Dr. Puam's reason for wanting to get rid of his wife is that he wants to marry somebody else?"

"Exactly, otherwise he did not mind what she did."

"How does she take it?" asked Lady Blanche.

Mrs. Puam took it very hardly indeed. She also took it without dignity. She lost what little civilisation she had ever boasted, and became a wild Irishwoman from the Connemara again, animated by primitive passions, and urged to a primitive expression of them. But at least all artificiality left her, and even while she was weeping and lamenting and beating her head against Mrs. Gillespie's furniture, she was real. Also her despair was not wholly selfish.

"Me child!" was her first cry. "Me baby! me Dodo! me only one! Oh, tell him I'll do anything—go anywhere—never show me face again—whatever he likes—if only he won't take the child from me!"

Mrs. Gillespie went on another useless mission.

She was not a soft-hearted, any more than she was a soft-headed, woman; she had no sickly sentimentality over sinners. But she hated cruelty,

and it seemed to her that Dr. Puam was wantonly cruel over this matter.

"Even if I tell him the child is not his, won't he give her up to me?" eagerly asked Mrs. Puam. She was willing to commit any perjury for the sake of having the spoilt Dodo with her.

The case was pathetic, for Dodo was an unattractive child, and nobody wanted her in the least except her mother, least of all her father; but he found in her a weapon to wound his wife, and he used it mercilessly.

Lady Ockerley spat venom as usual.

"I knew how it would be," she drove all round the station observing.

"I wonder," moaned Mrs. Woolrich, "who will be the next?" And she looked instinctively towards Mrs. Culloch's bungalow.

On the whole, however, the ladies sympathised with Mrs. Puam. Mrs. Lovibond, possibly because she found harlots on the whole rather well spoken of than otherwise in the Bible, was loud in her defence, and brought her a goodly selection of "High-heeled Shoes for a Limping Sinner," and similar consolatory tracts. Mrs. Puam was not as grateful as she might have been for these attentions, and resolutely refused to be forcibly "saved" by Mrs. Lovibond, preach she never so enthusiastically.

"I may not be a holy woman," declared the unwilling candidate for conversion, "and I am not denying I have me faults, though they have been punished a deal more severely than their deserts. But I am not—I never have been—I never will be—a heretic."

Sympathetic though they might express themselves, the other ladies, with this proselytising exception, held aloof, and left Mrs. Puam entirely to Mrs. Gillespie and Lady Blanche, and such male consolation and support as she could collect. These two ladies were now placed in a singular position. Unimpeachably virtuous themselves, and without even a momentary temptation to be otherwise, they found themselves standing up for what was at any rate doubtful, even if it could not be called vice. Mrs. Gillespie took her stand on the ground that Dr. Puam's behaviour was the more reprehensible of the two; it was brutal, unchivalrous, and insincere. He was the primary cause of his wife's misdemeanours, and he had behaved without decency. He had, in short, played the immemorial part of Adam.

All women, since the beginning of the world, have resented this as unfair, and though there was no one to champion poor Eve at the time—both Adam and the Serpent having with characteristic masculine callousness, as soon as they had got all

they wanted, left her to bear the whole brunt of the trouble—all her daughters have been on her side ever since. Possibly some few of them may have avenged her. Let us hope so, at any rate, in the interests of justice.

Lady Blanche supported Mrs. Gillespie not so much out of sympathy with Mrs. Puam's shortcomings as with indignation at the self-righteousness of the rest. Moreover, she took a bird's-eye view of the situation.

"I do not see," she remarked, "that it makes any difference whether these women are moral or immoral. They are quite impossible anyhow, and no amount of morality would ever make them anything else."

The end of the *impasse* came rather suddenly. One fine morning Dr. Puam appeared at the Club in a state of wild excitement. His daughter had disappeared in the night. On his galloping up the Mall to the Gillespies' bungalow, he found that his wife had disappeared too. Mrs. Gillespie said she knew nothing about it, and it was impossible, before the expressive eyebrows, to show signs of unbelief. He never saw either of the fugitives again.

There is a very pretty villa above Monaco belonging to a Russian prince. He never goes there himself, but the villa is inhabited by *une*

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de ces dames and her child, which is popularly called "the little Russian." The lady is a very pretty woman, and she is often to be seen in the Casino at night in a low-cut dress and an enormous hat, wearing a quantity of very beautiful jewellery, which her soft Irish voice does not assure whoever may address her is "Parisian."

CHAPTER X

BLANCHE'S golden dream of India had vanished. It was, then, at best an everyday country—no outlying suburb of El Dorado or the Garden of Eden. The disqualifications of England to rank with those unparalleled regions held sway here too, and more also. For England—at least, the last time she saw it—was basking in the sunshine of a new happiness. The present and the future were glittering with promise. But now it was only the past that was golden, and even its colour was rapidly fading.

In nine out of ten marriages “for love,” as we say, there is something to take the place of the glamour when it is gone. Community of interests most often is the substitute. But she had no common past with Bertram; they had lived in different worlds, where the manners and customs were diametrically opposed, and they each spoke the language of their world, with the result that they often failed to understand each other. They had no common present, as their

tastes were radically dissimilar ; and there was no hint of a child to make them a common future.

Most men and all women grow after marriage. It does not signify what was their age or knowledge of the world ; their minds are still capable of expansion. The fortunate ones grow up side by side and keep pace with each other. But in the Charlesworths' case, Lady Blanche grew and Bertram did not. So the consequence was that the bandage which Love had placed over her eyes fell from them. And with the glamour of her marriage, all her other golden dreams dissolved away too.

But she came of a steadfast and loyal race, and all the honourable men and virtuous women behind her were so strong that it never occurred to her, as it might to a more vain and selfish woman, to try and avoid the consequences of having made a mistake. It was her own doing, and the plea of ignorance was no excuse. After all, she was not the only one. Perhaps Bertram was equally disappointed in her. The recollection of this fact showed what a humble-minded woman she was. Vain folk can never see but the one side of things.

Love dies. But his legacy is often a certain tenderness in a kind heart. Lady Blanche knew now that Bertram was not the twin-soul she had

unconsciously sought throughout space, but he could never be to her quite the same as another man. So she was honestly pleased when she was told how popular he was. It was not a popularity which she thought worth having for herself, but it pleased him, and she was too generous to grudge him his satisfaction when she found none.

Bertram himself was perfectly content. His first annoyance at his wife's secession from the society of the station soon disappeared. It was just as well she should not "go out," if it bored her. Gladys Culloch (awfully jolly woman, Gladys!) "went out" a lot and enjoyed it all; it was capital fun to be with her and hear her chaff about everything. Perhaps if Blanche "went out" much, a fellow would not get so much of Gladys. Things were best as they were.

Mrs. Culloch did not think so. She rather liked Captain Charlesworth, who was an open-handed man and easily induced to pay for the privilege of her friendship; but unless she could use him as a weapon against his wife he was of very little value to her; and how was she able to do so, if the wife never saw him in Mrs. Culloch's company, to be thereby provoked to jealousy and rancour? It was annoying to have her plans miscarrying so.

About the end of February Mrs. Eden's approach was heralded suddenly by a storm of letters and telegrams, chiefly addressed to Ethel Woolrich. It was gathered that Colonel Eden had hinted that the war was almost over, and his impetuous spouse seized the first pretext to escape from her relations, with whom she was notoriously bored. She must have everything ready in India for the return of dear Bob, she explained, and on this representation her relations were weak enough to let her loose. She hurled herself upon Pultanpore in a perfect whirlwind of rejoicing, in which the joyous prospect of dear Bob's return was unaccountably lost.

There was something irresistible, it would appear, about Mrs. Eden in this rollicking mood. She dawned on Pultanpore at a dance at the Club, and she had a dozen partners for every dance, every man in the room jostling his fellows in his eagerness to force himself on her notice. She romped about the ballroom till four in the morning, while Mrs. Culloch pretended, in *kala jagahs* with Bertram, not to be envious. She was up at eight, galloping about the Mall on a pony belonging to Major MacCorquodale, with all the subalterns who were not on duty at her heels. Her bungalow was crowded with callers all the afternoon. She held the dinner-table at Mrs.

Cheswright's in the evening, and afterwards sang little French songs which fortunately nobody understood, though they applauded rapturously.

Mrs. Eden had to have her fling before she remembered anything serious. But at the back of her mind there was always a lurking desire for wider worlds to conquer. She believed that judicious handling of Lady Blanche would procure her these. Surely when they both went "home" Lady Blanche would give her those introductions which would open all doors to her. Mrs. Eden felt she had a genius for society. It was a pity to waste it on her own circumscribed circles. When her spirits subsided a little she went to renew her acquaintance with Lady Blanche.

"Oh, dear Lady Blanche, I am so delighted to see you !"

"That is very kind of you," said Blanche pleasantly. "I should have expected to be forgotten after all these months."

"Oh, nobody could possibly forget you !"
Mrs. Eden believed in spreading flattery thick as if it were butter on bread, being an unconscious disciple of Disraeli; with her too, *les absents avaient toujours tort*, so that her abuse was quite as lavish as her praise. This kind of person gives food for thought.

"And now do let us talk," she proceeded. Her idea of conversation was to monopolise it herself. Lady Blanche was an excellent listener, and unfortunately for her Mrs. Eden found this out at an early stage. No other lady in the station excelled in this department, so Mrs. Eden invariably came to Lady Blanche several times a week and poured out the whole contents of her vain and trivial little soul before her. Lady Blanche was kept well up-to-date of such news as the station afforded, after a miserable period of mental darkness, for Mrs. Gillespie and her small circle, which consisted principally of Florence Dommartin and Torquil MacLean, with the occasional addition of Donald MacKenzie, did not gossip, but talked of people and things far outside the narrow bounds of Pultanpore. Mrs. Eden would have thought such topics dull, but she gave herself, or was given, no opportunity to hear them discussed.

"I never could stand Mrs. Gillespie and all her prudish ideas," she would remark. "I cannot understand why you should like her."

"I have never noticed anything particularly prudish in Mrs. Gillespie's ideas," was invariably Blanche's calm reply.

"Oh, but she is so shocked at anyone flirting! I have seen her face. I don't know whether it is

sour grapes or not," with a chuckle, "but she does hate poor little mortals who like a bit of fun, like me."

"I don't think she hates you. I never heard her mention you," said Blanche.

"Beneath her notice, am I? Well, I don't care. I wonder Gladys Culloch has not tried to poach away Captain Gillespie. I don't care about married men myself, but she does." This was said with a meaning look which was quite thrown away on Lady Blanche. "Besides, Captain Gillespie's such a stick; nearly as much of a prude as his wife, I declare! What I can't understand was their mixing themselves up with Noreen Puam like that. What made them do it?"

"Common Christian charity, I suppose," said Blanche quietly.

"Oh, could it have been *that*? I should think it was a wish to meddle and set us all to rights. But I call it hard to take in a woman like that, who really, you know, was no better than a common *cocote*, and then turn up your nose at poor little me! I never ran away with anybody."

"No," responded Blanche, as she paused apparently for an answer.

"Not because I haven't had the chance, mind

you!" resumed Mrs. Eden. "Heaps of men have asked me to do it, but it always seemed to me such a stupid thing to do. I have a much better time as I am. What would be the use of giving people something to gossip about?"

These being her views, Mrs. Eden's application of them was slightly startling. Before she had been at Pultanpore a week, there was scarcely a female tongue that was not yelping on her track. An affair of long standing with Major MacCorquodale, second in command of the Highland regiment, was raked up out of its ashes. This hero, at whose reported death in the Transvaal during the war women in every part of the Empire went into demonstrative mourning, attached his huge but unmuscular person to Mrs. Eden's figurative apron-strings with so much blowing of trumpets, both on her side and on his, that the deafest and least scandalous-minded person between the jungle and the Grand Trunk Road must have heard it.

Major MacCorquodale was the type of warrior whose laurels were won at the expense of the other sex, not of his own. He was a poor soldier, but it was not as a soldier that he aspired to shine; it was as a social success, and there his ambition was gratified. On the barrack square he was feeble, but before the footlights he was

sublime. He fell off the meekest horse that ever wore shoes, but he waltzed as perfectly as mortal man could. His experience of war was small; his experience of love unlimited. In appearance he produced a first impression of good looks. His height was imposing, and though he was rather fleshy than muscular, his carriage was taking to the casual eye. A certain type of women raved about his beauty. But it really did not amount to more than a coarse comeliness, marred by a suggestion of flabbiness both mental and bodily. His manner had just that effusive familiarity which women either delight in or detest, and which men envy or despise. His outlook on the world in general was limited, and his likes and dislikes strong and unreasonable.

His exact attitude to Mrs. Eden would be difficult to define. She believed him to be devoted to her heart and soul. But he had very little heart and still less soul, and it was distinctly doubtful whether he brought even the little he possessed thereof into his allegiance.

But he enjoyed compromising her to the utmost of his ability, possibly believing this to be an achievement which other men would envy or admire.

He disliked women who were what he was pleased to call "stiff"; women whom he thought

ugly; and women with any ideas in their head beyond amusement. He also disliked Torquil MacLean, and most of the Lancers, and all the civilians in Pultanpore, and anybody who achieved anything in any department in the world beyond.

Whom he disliked he invariably attempted to annoy, if not injure, but so entirely without subtlety that it was not difficult to elude his vengeance. His method with men was to call them names of varying degrees of grossness, and, if they happened to be in his own regiment—which was generally the case, as he was afraid of annoying anybody who might call him to account—to impose on them as much irksome duty as he could contrive to devise. His method with women was to ignore them as pointedly as he dared.

Mrs. Eden thought him worth imperilling her good name for.

It is necessary to add after all this that he was a bachelor.

Mrs. Eden danced with him, dined with him, rode with him, and monopolised him at all picnics or other entertainments which they both graced. By the time Lady Ockerley and Mrs. Woolrich had rent every shred of reputation from her which they had hitherto left (and that was not much);

that Mrs. Lovibond had five special prayer-meetings on her behalf, though even she was not silly enough to be present; and that several other men in the station hitherto quiescent were emboldened to make decidedly impertinent advances to the heroine of the episode, she had had enough of it for the time being. Nobody disputed her conquest, and this took away half its savour.

There was a subaltern in the Lancers, who had inherited a large income, and a new baronetcy from a soap-boiling grandfather. He was the richest man in Pultanpore by many thousand a year, and therefore the most sought after. He exhibited the reckless disregard of money which is so often a characteristic of the offspring of the *nouveau riche*, and which usually dissipates the parental fortune as fast as it was acquired. The *parvenu* would be wise to have daughters only; they usually marry into an old family which takes care of the money; the young male of their species has no notion of doing so. Sir Herbert Flinton lent money to men without asking for security, and bestowed dresses and jewellery on women for most inadequate exchange. He flattered himself that he knew the world, especially the female portion of it; but meanwhile, though *rusé* enough to elude the simple wiles of mothers and daughters on honest matrimony

intent, he fell an easy prey to women with whom a ceremony was out of the question.

When Mrs. Eden arrived at Pultanpore, Sir Herbert had for some time been sharing with Bertram Charlesworth the privilege of paying bills for Mrs. Culloch. Mrs. Woolrich had long since, though reluctantly, given up hopes of being eventually able to speak of "my daughter, Lady Flinton." She was, however, so ill-advised, or so calculating, as to remark before Mrs. Eden that the woman who removed "that poor young man" from the influence of "that harpy" would be doing a good deed, but that, alas! the woman did not exist who could do so, as the "harpy" was "so fascinating to men."

Mrs. Eden pricked up her ears. Possibly Mrs. Woolrich intended she should do so, either from a desire for revenge on Mrs. Culloch, or from a dim design of catching Sir Herbert on the rebound; she was one of those women who hold that the end justifies the means—a doctrine they carry to lengths only possible to the "unco guid."

Now Mrs. Eden had already had a preliminary canter of a flirtation with Sir Herbert, which was cut short by the outbreak of the war. She did not want money, but she did want glory, or what she understood to be such. The undisputed

possession of Major MacCorquodale did not satisfy her yearnings. The mere conquest of a man was scarcely worth the trouble of engaging on it, but Mrs. Culloch was a redoubtable foe who would fight for her property in a most inspiring manner.

But a necessity to Mrs. Eden's soul was an audience, or rather the sort of confidante who sings contralto in an opera to the prima donna's soprano.

"What do you think happened yesterday?" she inquired of Lady Blanche one morning. On receiving the obvious answer that Lady Blanche did not know, she gave a fluffy chuckle and proceeded to the unexciting climax: "Sir Herbert came to tiffin with me."

"Did he really?" responded Blanche, with the indifference she felt.

"But you don't understand! I'm the only woman he has ever tiffined with except Gladys Culloch. She made him swear he never would. Isn't that a triumph?"

"What! that he should break his word?"

"You wouldn't have him keep it, would you, to such a woman as that?"

"I don't see that that matters," calmly replied Lady Blanche.

"Oh, don't you? I believe you mean to be

nasty! Well, two can play at that game. I should think *you*, Lady Blanche, would be the *last* woman to stick up for Mrs. Culloch." Mrs. Eden spoke with spiteful emphasis, and paused for her words to have full effect.

"I scarcely know Mrs. Culloch," said Lady Blanche. "I did not know she wanted sticking up for."

"No—and no more she does. And it is a shame to be nasty to you, you poor thing, when you must be feeling sore over it already! But, never mind, I'll pay her out for you."

Lady Blanche knew perfectly well that Mrs. Eden wanted her to ask what she meant, and restrained her natural desire to do so. A little patience would soon elicit the explanation.

And so it did.

"I always think it is the greatest shame to flirt with married men," went on Mrs. Eden virtuously. "I call it a low trick, and it isn't as if there weren't plenty of bachelors. Especially men who haven't been married very long, so that their wives haven't got over being in love with them. But a woman like Gladys Culloch would do anything! She would take a man away on his honeymoon."

"I daresay," said Lady Blanche, waiting for the point.

"Of course, I sympathise with you," proceeded Mrs. Eden. "*All* my sympathies are with you! I hate to see a woman doing another a bad turn like that. It is quite different," she added, "taking away a man a woman is flirting with—that's only fair, and the best woman wins. But when it comes to taking away a newly-married husband, as Gladys Culloch has done by you——"

Lady Blanche suddenly turned very cold. But to Mrs. Eden's watching eye she showed no sign of discomfiture.

"She doesn't care a bit," thought Mrs. Eden, with disappointment. Aloud she ran on: "But just you watch, and I tell you you'll see her squirm. She never had a chance with me at any time, and she knows it. Oh, so sweet as she pretended to be to me when I came back! I know now what it was for. But she shan't be the ruin of that poor Flinton boy, I swear she shan't! She makes men pay her bills, a thing I would never do! She's been in clover all this time with two of them to be her bankers, but I advise her not to run up many more, for half the money's going to be taken away."

Lady Blanche did not hear a word of this speech. She was entirely absorbed with the blow she had received. She had known for a long time that her happiness had somehow fallen short,

that the bright thing she had clung to had somehow become dim. But she supposed it was always so, and that the bliss of lovers was ever an evanescent thing. She thought Bertram loved her still, though obliged to admit that his idea of love was not the beautiful thing hers was. Now she knew he loved her no longer, even with his inferior imitation of love. She did not doubt Mrs. Eden's story. She knew it was true. A thousand trifles returned to her memory and proved it. She had left her own people and her father's house for a phantom.

A more self-centred woman might have been more visibly hurt. Blanche only felt numbed. Mrs. Eden's chatter passed over her head as the waters might pass over a drowned sailor. It was only long after, as it seemed to her when she had been wandering for hours in a hopeless desert, that she heard her companion's parting words—

“Now, mark my words, this is your chance. Gladys will fight like fury over Sir Herbert, and she won't bother about your husband then. It will be your chance to get him back.”

Blanche smiled, for she knew that the worst tragedy of all had befallen her, and that she did not want him back.

CHAPTER XI

DURING the preliminary skirmishes between Mrs. Eden and Mrs. Culloch, a temporary diversion was afforded by the return of Captain MacGusty and his bride.

"She came out from England to marry him," said Mrs. Woolrich, who made a call on Lady Blanche expressly to air this exclusive information. "I am told she is a pretty girl, English, not Scotch, as one might have expected. I hope she will be a great acquisition."

Mrs. Woolrich spoke in a mournfully reproachful voice. She did not consider the dowager bride of the station (Lady Blanche herself) to have come up to expectation as an "acquisition."

"Of course," she resumed, "I do not take the same interest in the Highland ladies as in my own young officers' wives. Still, as there is no Colonel's wife in their regiment, perhaps I ought to be the first to call and take her by the hand. Do you not think so, dear Lady Blanche?"

"I have no doubt she will be very grateful," was the reply.

"A young bride is always so interesting," added Mrs. Woolrich in a simpering tone. "And her trousseau may give us ideas. It is very hard up here to get ideas."

Lady Blanche agreed. It seemed very hard indeed.

"We shall soon have no unmarried captains left at this rate," remarked Mrs. Woolrich, "and curiously enough they have all chosen wives from far away, instead of girls in the station. You need never believe, dear Lady Blanche, that it is easy to marry girls in India. On the contrary, it is nearly as hard as at home. And yet one would have thought that colonels' daughters, with their position in society and all, would have carried all before them."

And the poor lady sighed.

"I am taking Alice and Gertrude up to Simla for the hot weather," she resumed, "and I am positively sending Ethel home, for I really think she will have a better chance there. And there are always such possibilities on steamers too."

Mrs. Eden, who happened to be calling on Lady Blanche at the same time, opened her eyes very wide, and then closed one of them in a distinct wink.

Mrs. Woolrich did not see this, and cooed on—

“Yes, it is sad all the captains marrying. There is now scarcely anyone left for the girls to marry here, because of course one would not wish them to become the wives of subalterns.”

“Not even of Sir Herbert Flinton?” asked Mrs. Eden *sotto voce*.

“There is Captain MacLean,” suggested Blanche vaguely.

“Oh, but he would not do at all!” returned Mrs. Woolrich decidedly; “he is not in the least my girls’ sort. And I must say I should not care for that arrangement *at all*. I should like my girls’ husbands to be nice, friendly, good fellows, like yours, dear Lady Blanche, or Colonel Eden,” nodding at that absent hero’s spouse, “or,” with temerity, “Major MacCorquodale.”

“Oh, he isn’t a marrying man!” cried Mrs. Eden.

“I know he is not,” Mrs. Woolrich hastened to deprecate. “I did not mean to insinuate for a moment that there was any question of it, dear Mrs. Eden.”

“C, A, T,” exclaimed Mrs. Eden, as soon as the Colonel’s wife had turned her broad back. “Sending dear Ethel to England to get her married indeed! Just as if everybody didn’t know

it was time to get her out of the way of the married men she is so fond of flirting with!"

"I don't think one ought to say that sort of thing about a girl," said Blanche.

"Why not, when she takes to wearing Empire tea-gowns? Time enough to say *anything* then, I should think! It's their own fault."

"I thought she was supposed to be a great friend of yours," remarked Blanche mildly.

"I must go and call on this Mrs. MacGusty," returned Mrs. Eden, putting on her gloves and ignoring Blanche's suggestion as blandly as she ignored the claims of friendship. "I don't expect much of her, as she's only just married, they are generally slow then. Still she *might* be amusing. When are you going?"

"Oh—I—don't know," stammered Lady Blanche, who had not remembered that she also would be expected to call. "I might come with you," she added, entering into the spirit of the comedy.

"Do," said Mrs. Eden.

Mrs. MacGusty was holding quite a levee. She started a little when Lady Blanche came in, but rustled across the room and held out her hand with perfect presence of mind. Her eyes met Lady Blanche's rather dubiously, but a smile dawned in them when her visitor greeted her. Lady Blanche was, if possible, a shade more

courteous than usual, but was careful to give no hint of having seen Mrs. MacGusty before. Captain MacGusty, a man who looked like the foreign caricaturists' conception of a Briton and had a pronounced Glasgow accent, came forward with an anxious eye. Sir Herbert Flinton stood near the tea-table, and assumed, as soon as Mrs. Eden appeared, an elaborate unconsciousness of the presence of Mrs. Culloch, who sprawled her long length over a contiguous sofa. Lady Blanche found herself seated by Mr. Charles Solly, the Lancer subaltern who was always being court-martialled by his brother officers. He was a well-meaning young man, whose errors were chiefly due to a superabundance of animal spirits, and an inability to forget that he was the very distant cousin of a peer, who had no nearer relations than his (Mr. Solly's) own family. He was fond of speaking of himself as "a fellow who may one day be an Honourable," his actions in the meanwhile being peculiarly devoid of "that repose which marks the caste of Vere de Vere." He meant to make himself agreeable to Lady Blanche.

"Not often we have the pleasure of seein' you at the club, Lady Blanche," he remarked as an opening.

"No, I seldom go there," returned Blanche,

with something of the freezing effect perfect truth so often has on conversation.

"Pity!" remarked Mr. Solly; "we have a nailin' good time there—you would enjoy it. Last night there was no end of a rag! Some old civilian josser wanted to have one tune on the band, and I wanted to have another. I told him to leave the band alone—it was the artillery band, don't yer know?—and he said I was insulting him, by Jove! Did you ever hear of such a silly old josser?"

"It was Colonel Dommartin, and he used to be a gunner," remarked Captain MacGusty, as if in extenuation.

"He thinks it belongs to him still," resumed Mr. Solly, "and then what do you think——"

Lady Blanche completely lost the thread of this stirring narrative, on account of a statement which at that moment she heard Mrs. MacGusty making in a languid voice :

"When I was staying at the Duke of Pimlico's."

"Oh, when was that?" asked Mrs. Eden's interested tones.

"About a year ago. But let me give you some more tea," Mrs. MacGusty added hastily as she caught Lady Blanche's eye. Yet she had spoken only the literal truth. She had passed three nights

in that ducal mansion, though not on the footing she implied.

Mr. Solly's voice was heard continuing: "Said he'd report me to old Woolrich. As if I minded that! So, of course, I chaffed his head off and——"

"What a charming tea-equipage!" remarked Mrs. Culloch, under the obligation to admire the possessions of a bride.

"I am so glad you like it. I had it copied from one I admired at Lord Melton Mowbray's; of course you know they have exquisite taste——"

"She must be very well connected," whispered Mrs. Eden to Sir Herbert.

"Um—ah—I daresay," said Sir Herbert, writhing under the lash of Mrs. Culloch's eyes, as she observed his confidential proximity to her rival.

Mrs. Eden made a mental note of her impression as to Mrs. MacGusty's high origin. It fitted in with her desire for wider spheres. If Lady Blanche proved a broken reed, what matter, now there was someone else at hand who could equally be used as a ladder to social advancement.

"Everybody knows old Ockerley," answered Mr. Solly, addressing Lady Blanche directly. "Nobody thinks anything of him. Don't you remember the story of him and General Cayzer at

Aldershot? You don't? Oh, then, I must tell it you, for it's a capital story. You must know old Ockerley, who was then C.-O. of the South-down Regiment, was always making excuses to go and speak to the General so as to get himself into notice and be recommended for his zeal. So one day, on a field-day it was, he rode up and, for want of anything else to say, asked : 'Please, sir, what shall I do with my pioneers?' Of course everybody knows," Mr. Solly always assumed the security of Macaulay with regard to his schoolboy, "that the pioneers always go ahead of the regiment. So Cayzer just turned round and said : 'Do with your pioneers, sir? Tell them to go and dig a hole as big as hell and put you and your — regiment into it.'"

Mr. Solly told this anecdote without making any polite substitute for the highly coloured adjective which adorned its finish, and Lady Blanche, who particularly disliked it, did not laugh as heartily as the others.

"I'd as soon have appointed old Mother Woolrich to command a station as Ockerley," remarked Mrs. Culloch gracefully.

"Did you hear what he said at the last brigade parade?" chimed in Sir Herbert. "He gave the order for some absolutely impossible manoeuvre, and when Woolrich asked if it was right—think—"

ing, of course, he had heard it wrongly—the old fool said he didn't know, but he would ask the Brigade-major."

"That's the sort of man the War Office sends out to command Us," remarked Mr. Solly, in so inflated a tone that Mrs. Culloch called out, "Pity they don't make you a General of Division, ain't it, Sol?"

Lady Blanche found herself wondering whether the type of general into which Mr. Solly and Sir Herbert would develop if spared so long to His Majesty's service would materially differ from that so much objected to as represented by Sir Arthur Ockerley. She could not imagine either of the young gentlemen in question attaining by any means on earth to the efficiency Captain Gillespie talked of as of an Utopian dream.

"I suppose," she remarked diffidently, "the War Office can't send what they have not got, and that nearly all the Generals who are at all good are at the front."

But if she hoped to hear the question discussed, as it would have been at the Gillespies', she was disappointed. No one present was capable of regarding any subject from the abstract point of view. Mrs. Eden was absorbed in an intention—which she presently carried out—of jumping up and walking Sir Herbert off under the very nose

of Mrs. Culloch. Mrs. Culloch herself was straining every nerve to fix his wandering attention. Mrs. MacGusty knew and cared nothing about army problems, and neither her husband nor Mr. Solly had ever given them serious thought, for the excellent reason that they had nothing in their heads to think with. So the question of the efficiency of General Ockerley, or of any other commander, fell to the ground.

Lady Blanche rose to go. Mrs. MacGusty sprang up and walked out on to the verandah with her.

"Good-bye, my lady, it was good of you to come," she said as simply as she might have at the cottage door of her father, the keeper, any day that the "young ladies" might have walked over from the "Abbey."

"Her ladyship behaved better than I expected of a fine lady," remarked Captain MacGusty, gazing after Blanche; "my heart came into my mouth when she came in, I can tell you! I thought she was come to give you clean away."

"*I didn't*," returned his wife. "Lady Blanche is a real lady. She would never do anyone a bad turn. You don't understand the real aristocracy, Alexander."

Captain MacGusty (who had never been called anything grander than Sandy before) accepted

this rebuke meekly. He thought his wife the genteelest and most admirable of women.

As far as intelligence went, she certainly did the sturdy Dalesmen from whom she sprang credit in the way in which she adapted herself to her surroundings. She had excellent taste, far better than that of most of the ladies of Pultanpore who believed themselves well dressed when they were merely gorgeous. Her tact was un-failing, and though she was of the stuff from which leaders are made, and in a few weeks dominated Pultanpore as she had dominated the housekeeper's room at Heribert, Pultanpore never knew it.

Lady Ockerley believed "that nice young Mrs. MacGusty" to be a *protégée* of her own, and allowed her to modify her toilettes under a firm belief that all her ideas were culled from the ward-robes of duchesses—which indeed they possibly were. Mrs. Woolrich said that "that dear bride" was "so unassuming," and tried in vain to induce Alice and Gertrude to copy her way of walking and dancing. Mrs. Eden became her inseparable friend, and made her the operative confidences hitherto reserved for Lady Blanche, and Mrs. Culloch did not realise that her own advances were snubbed, so very politely did the bride evade them.

Mrs. MacGusty did not aspire to be an intimate of Mrs. Gillespie's. She remarked to her husband that it was all very well with the other ladies, but that when her ladyship and Mrs. Gillespie were there, she felt that they knew so much more than she did that she was "a great ignorant goat" in their presence; and when the devoted Captain MacGusty assured her that she did not in the least resemble this remarkable animal, either before those ladies or behind their backs, she shook her head, and reminded him of his ignorance of "the real aristocracy."

The Pultanpore races which took place in March were supposed to be a particularly good meeting, and the station filled up with strangers at the approach of the event. It was looked forward to at Pultanpore as if it were Ascot, Goodwood, and all the Newmarket meetings rolled into one, and was invariably accompanied by the best ball of the season. It was at about this period that the rivalry between Mrs. Eden and Mrs. Culloch came to a height. Mrs. Culloch asked Sir Herbert Flinton to drive her down to the course, and he refused on account of a previous engagement. Mrs. Culloch knowing full well who was the lady to be honoured by his society, flounced off to ask Bertram for the same favour. But Bertram had already arranged to drive his wife, so that Mrs.

Culloch was reduced to saying off-handedly to her husband—

“I suppose you will drive me down, Gus?”

Gus, who was a peaceful man, agreed with reservations. On the first day of the races his wife waited ready dressed for the fray, while carriage after carriage whirled by beyond the cactus hedges, and time advanced, till she could bear it no longer.

“Go and tell the Sahib to hurry,” she said sharply to her bearer.

“The Sahib has gone, Memsahib,” returned that impassive functionary.

Mrs. Culloch screamed aloud. She did not tear her transformation, but she gave way to all other approved signs of rage. She banged the furniture, shook her fists, stamped till everything in the room rattled, and used language, the variety of which any sea-captain might have envied. She had just broken Captain Culloch's favourite, carefully embrowned meerschaum pipe by hurling it into the fireplace, when wheels were heard in the compound. She rushed out like a furious whirlwind, and beheld Mr. Hodgkins trembling in her husband's two-wheeled trap.

“Captain Culloch asked me to come back for you,” he quavered. “I was to say that he had promised to drive Miss Ethel Woolrich.”

Mrs. Culloch said some things about Ethel Woolrich which made Mr. Hodgkins blush till he expected to hear his backbone frizzling. He used to dream about the drive which followed whenever afterwards he had indigestion.

It may be imagined that Mrs. Culloch did not reach the racecourse in the most angelic of tempers.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Eden on arriving at the races in glory with Sir Herbert, was disappointed at the failure of Mrs. Culloch to be present to see her own triumphant entry into the grand stand. This frustration of her plans upset her balance so much that she was obliged to soothe her feelings by demonstratively—and quite unnecessarily—cutting Major MacCorquodale in the paddock. This blow to his vanity almost reduced that heroic warrior to tears. He went home on the spot, to the bitter grief of Alice Woolrich, with whom he was walking at the moment.

Sir Herbert Flinton was so much elated by this tribute to his attractions that he made so staring an exhibition of himself that even Colonel Woolrich, who had been acting the parts of the proverbial bat and mole until that moment, was obliged to open his reluctant eyes.

It was at this critical moment that Mrs. Culloch appeared on the scene. Mr. Hodgkins, pale and

perspiring from his recent experience, left her at the door of the grand stand, and fled incontinent in search of alcoholic refreshment. She, with the concentrated obscurity of several thunderclouds upon her brow, gazed into the arena ; where she first beheld Sir Herbert in full course of the exhibition aforesaid, the hated Mrs. Eden in a Paris gown at his side egging him on to destruction.

Mrs. Culloch's feelings resembled those of a man who has just suffered the deadliest insult his mind can conceive. So mild a fluid as blood could have done nothing at that moment to quench her thirst for an instant and shattering revenge. She threw a savage glance round for someone whom she could hurt mortally. With the quick eye of a hawk she espied three partridges on whom to swoop. She cleared the thundercloud from her brow and advanced, all radiant smiles, to meet Mr. Solly, walking with Mrs. Cheswright.

"What is this," she asked in a high clear voice, "that I hear about a small-pox epidemic in West-sea? That was where you left your children, Mabel, wasn't it?"

"What?" cried Mrs. Cheswright, in the voice of a wounded roe. "Wherever did you hear it, Gladys?"

"Oh, wasn't it in the papers? Come, Mr.

Solly, I want to go to the paddock," added Mrs. Culloch, as Mrs. Cheswright wailed out: "Charlie! I wonder if Charlie has heard it? I must find Charlie!"

Trailing down the enclosure, Mrs. Culloch passed behind Torquil MacLean.

"MacLean alone, as usual," she remarked in her carrying voice. "What an awful thing it must be for a man to be boycotted by his regiment like that! I wonder he don't chuck the service. Some things can never be lived down."

She had not the satisfaction of seeing whether or no she had hit her second partridge. The third was near the paddock gate.

"Morning, Bertie!" she called out. "Backed any winners yet, old boy? Oh, Lady Blanche!" with a badly acted start, "I did not see you."

Lady Blanche saw through this transparent device and smiled. Bertram himself had scarcely been near enough to hear what Mrs. Culloch said; he merely looked up from an absorbing conversation with Colonel Woolrich and offered to relieve Mr. Solly of the burden of escorting Mrs. Culloch further. But if looks could slay, that lady would have been a corpse, in spite of the indifference of those she aimed at.

Donald MacKenzie was standing by Lady Blanche, and his eyes, usually as clear and tran-

quilt as the cairngorms in his dirk, flashed like its blade drawn in the sunlight.

"There are some women," he said in his dangerous gentle voice, "who seem to combine the pigheadedness of Mother Eve with the tongue of the Serpent. One cannot help thinking they make a third sex all to themselves, they are so unlike other women."

"You are dreadfully severe," said Lady Blanche. "I am not going to pretend I don't know whom you mean. But after all, I don't see that there is any particular harm in her. She is rather second-rate, and thinks it grand to be noisy. That is all."

"Do you think so?" returned Donald, looking rather closely at Lady Blanche. He had not yet learnt to control the expressions of his face.

Blanche smiled. She felt years older than Donald—actually she had eighteen months' start of him in life—and thought herself easily able to baffle his very simple attempt to read her secret feelings. At the same time she wondered at herself, with an odd sort of amusement, why she felt so little animus against Mrs. Culloch. On the contrary, her impression was that a devotion so lightly won, so lightly lost, as Bertram's was not a possession to envy any woman; rather was it contemptible to be taken in by it as she had been.

She herself loved him no more ; so she was invulnerable to what would have hurt a woman who loved him. It was sad, she thought, with an inward smile at her own impersonal attitude ; but it could not be helped. There was no longer a Garden of Eden in Asia. Anyone but a fool might have known it.

Meanwhile Mrs. Culloch walked Bertram with feverish haste over every portion of the paddock and enclosure in which ladies were tolerated. She trailed up and down like an Irishman with the tail of his coat at proverbial Donnybrook. She passed Mrs. Eden and Sir Herbert Flinton as often as she could manage to do so, and stared at them with all her might, cutting them dead every time. This she imagined to be an assertion of her dignity and the force of her personality ; she hoped it was a blow to Sir Herbert's heart and Mrs. Eden's self-sufficiency. As a matter of fact, they noticed the manœuvre, and lent themselves to it rapturously, laughing at it to each other boisterously each time it was repeated, and taking care to be always standing in the path whenever they saw Mrs. Culloch coming. It flattered them to the verge of intoxication.

Bertram meanwhile was honestly bewildered. Mrs. Culloch hitherto had kept her affair with Sir Herbert skilfully concealed from the other string

to her bow. Bertram could not imagine "what had come to Gladys"; she was quite unlike herself, and not, he quickly concluded, nearly as amusing as she used to be. He began to feel bored, wearied by her restlessness, and towards the end of the afternoon, suspicious that "something was up." An inkling of an idea that he was being made a tool of began to filter through the thick layer of self-approbation which encased his brain, and this was quite the most intolerable notion which possibly could do so. He looked round for his wife, but remembered that she had asked his permission to drive home early with Mr. MacKenzie. If he could have seen Hector Gillespie or Torquil MacLean, he would have escaped to them. But they were both gone, and he had perforce to endure Mrs. Culloch's changed manner as best he could.

To the onlookers, the whole scene was as obvious as if it had been elaborately explained to them beforehand. Lady Ockerley saw it with joy, for she loved scandal as a dog loves carrion. Mrs. Woolrich, who disliked the least hint of emotion, passion, or any other element disturbing to the conventions of every day, became increasingly uncomfortable. Colonel Woolrich, and most of the other senior officers, frowned heavily, feeling it indecent that a mere subaltern should

thus hold the stage and be the prize of two ladies' competition. The girls, and some of the married women, who would imitate the two heroines if they dared or were equipped by nature for the task, nourished and communicated to each other vitriolic opinions of "the Culloch" and "the Eden."

It was a pitiable scene.

CHAPTER XII

SIR HERBERT'S moment of triumph was but short-lived. But while it lasted it was so utter and complete as to satisfy his not very exacting soul. It was really divided into two acts, of which the first took place on the race-course, and the second at the ball that night. It was supposed to be a particularly choice ball. The champagne—usually the criterion of a ball's success—was excellent and abounding, and a great many people under its influence waxed alarmingly gay and garrulous, and towards morning either quarrelled with their greatest friend, took their worst enemy to their bosom, or melted into tears of self-pity or remorse for a misspent life.

Mr. Hodgkins was thereby emboldened to propose to Gertrude Woolrich on the spur of the moment, such an idea never having crossed his mind in his saner moments. Alice Woolrich completely forgot that the world was hollow, and her doll stuffed with sawdust; she looked so

pretty that Major MacCorquodale danced with her five times, and excited hopes which faded in the grey dawn. Mrs. Eden's laugh became shriller and shriller; Sir Herbert became more and more demonstratively affectionate, and Mrs. Culloch became reckless.

It was at supper. Mrs. Eden and Sir Herbert had a table *à deux* in the middle of the room, under the centre lamp, which beat on them like the proverbial "fierce light" on a throne. Mrs. Culloch sat at a less conspicuous table with Bertram. She was excited almost to madness; her eyes glittered, and she poured out the most *risqué* stories she knew, couched in the most salacious language; but she failed to amuse Bertram, because she was palpably thinking of and looking at the centre table.

A khitmagar set down a dish of bananas in front of them. Mrs. Culloch drained her glass of champagne (one of many), and catching up a banana, sped it in the direction of her defaulting lover. The proverbial inability of women to throw straight proved, like so many other proverbial things, a broken reed to trust to, and the banana hit Sir Herbert full in the face.

Mrs. Culloch's laugh broke into the buzz that arose from the other tables; the rest of the room, which after the first surprise lost most of what

sense it had ever boasted, fell in with her humour. There were yells from the men, hysteric shrieks from the women, and dessert flying in the air in every direction.

Mrs. Eden suddenly became a little frightened at the pandemonium she seemed to have let loose about her ears. She began to cry, and was led from the room by Colonel Woolrich, whom champagne rendered fatherly, while Sir Herbert was busily occupied in returning missiles from several other tables.

Mrs. Culloch looked like a Bacchante. She wagered in a loud voice to walk across her own table among the candles without setting light to herself or disturbing the arrangements, and at once attempted to do so. The only thing she knocked over was Bertram, on whose lap she descended with full force, after her transit over the table with skirts bunched about her, and more silk stocking and well-shaped calf showing than was decorous. Bertram's chair legs were not equal to the double strain, and gave way incontinent. Mrs. Woolrich fluttered in like a maternal hen to remove her daughter Alice, who had been appropriately pelting Major MacCorquodale with love-apples, while Mrs. Culloch was loudly disputing with several

hilarious subalterns the question whether she had won her wager or not.

One thing, in any case, she had lost, and that was Bertram's waning regard. He left the ball immediately and went home. He was not easily nauseated, but the limit of his endurance had been reached. He had borne complacently with Mrs. Culloch's mercenary appraising of her favours, for that he considered only "the thing"; her rather broad humour and want of reticence had amused him; her obvious physical charms had appealed to his slightly coarse taste. But a public failure to come up to his rather loose conceptions of "good form," a barefaced utilising of his own incomparable personality as a stalking-horse in a passion for one of his subalterns, was more than he could bear. His self-respect, though not easily aroused, was at last in arms.

He came into his own drawing-room once more, though he did not realise it, a free man. Lady Blanche, who had been dining with the Gillespies, was standing close under a tall standing lamp, looking at something in the palm of her hand. She was dressed in a white tea-gown of lace cunningly mingled with chiffon, out of which peeped white moss rose-buds. She wore a single long string of pearls, but nothing in her hair.

She looked so cool and fair after Bertram's final impression of Mrs. Culloch, flushed, noisy, overloaded with ornaments, that a great revulsion of feeling came over him.

Something clung about her of the atmosphere of Heribert, that old abbey where everything seemed to be basking in the peace of ages, and where the dignity of the life had impressed him more than he knew.

"An excellent thing in woman" was hers, and the assured step of those who have walked where they pleased and never had to cringe for a hundred generations. A subdued rustle, like the whisper of far-away brooks, was the only sound as she moved; there was no clinking and jingling of charms and bracelets, creaking of over-tight shoes and stays, and whirl of flouncing skirts.

Yes, she was very reposeful. Bertram, freshly impressed with the desirability of the woman he had married as compared with the woman he had allowed to come between her and himself, felt a passing wonder at his own self-deception. He was not of sufficiently fine grain to consider unfaithfulness—except in a woman—a cause for remorse, and his conscience was absolutely untroubled. But he thought he had been rather a fool, and was inwardly thankful that he had escaped being a greater one.

"After all, I'll back the thoroughbreds every time," he remarked to himself.

Blanche suffered the embrace with which all this expressed itself. It was his right, and she was too instinctively loyal and just to dream of denying it him. But even in his arms she wondered when Mrs. Culloch had last been there. A thought like this, especially if she can think it calmly, shows how far a woman has drifted from a man.

At her first opportunity she disengaged herself gently and crossed the room to her own chair by the fireplace. Bertram followed to lean against the mantelpiece.

"I say, old lady," he began impulsively, "I was thinking whether it would not be good fun for you and me to join MacLean and MacKenzie on their trip to Cashmir. You know they have arranged to go in April? Wouldn't it be rather sport?"

"You would like it, wouldn't you?" returned Blanche.

"If you came too," he responded, with a return to his manner of six months back, which she noticed with an inward shudder. "Wouldn't you like to come?"

"Certainly, if you wished it."

It seemed to him that this was not the answer

he wanted, and this was very exacting of him. Blanche spoke with the same degree of enthusiasm—neither more nor less—as when he had suggested her “going out in society” on their arrival at Pultanpore.

“We had a good time coming up country when we first came out,” he remarked.

“Oh, yes.”

She did not see what he was driving at.

“And why shouldn’t we have a good time again?” he added.

Why, indeed? An answer rose to Blanche’s lips, but she suppressed it. It was a bitter answer—true, and all the bitterer for that.

“Would Captain MacLean and Mr. MacKenzie care for us to join them?” she asked, with an attempt at lightness. “It seems to me that they should be consulted.”

“Oh, I’ll consult them fast enough,” returned Bertram. “But is there anything else you would like to do better for the hot weather?”

A wistful look swam over Lady Blanche’s face.

“I would have liked to go home,” she almost whispered. There was something characteristic in the wording—not the “I want to go home” of the woman who thinks her will must be law and is unprepared to give it up under any circumstances.

Bertram felt chilled by disappointment.

"You could do that," he said in an altered voice. "I couldn't, I don't think, unless peace was declared."

"Oh, of course, I was not thinking of leaving you," said Blanche in a matter-of-course tone.

Bertram felt relieved again.

"We'll see about it," he said cheerfully; "I'll talk about it to MacLean. And now it's getting late, old lady; let's go to bed."

Every dog has its day. But Sir Herbert's was a singularly short one, a sort of 21st of December among dogs.

Only two days after the races he rode up to Mrs. Eden on the Mall with an aspect of direst consternation.

"I say, Min, just speak to me a moment," he ejaculated in a hurried undertone.

Mrs. Eden pulled her pony back from the side of Lady Blanche's rather impatiently.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "You poor boy! Don't look as if you were going to commit suicide! It can't be so very bad."

"It is, though," returned Sir Herbert lugubriously; "it's all up."

"Bob hasn't heard anything?" exclaimed Mrs. Eden with sudden alarm; "but," she added, instantly reassured, "you really needn't be in the

least afraid of Bob. I always tell him everything, and he doesn't mind."

"I'm done for, all the same," said Sir Herbert, unappeased by the moral laxity of Bob. "It's all that old beast Woolrich. He's made my confidential report so damnably bad that Ockerley will have no option but to get me turned out of the regiment."

"Did Woolrich give any reason for being so nasty?" asked Mrs. Eden.

"No, he only said he might have reconsidered it if my conduct had been different, but I can't imagine what he meant. I am never late for parade," wailed the injured Sir Herbert, "and I'm sure I'm as popular as any other fellow in the regiment."

Mrs. Eden dropped her artificial babyishness of speech and manner, and looked serious. She did not really desire to injure Sir Herbert's career, only to annoy Mrs. Culloch, and she had sufficient sense to see through Colonel Woolrich's veiled hint and its application to Sir Herbert's recent behaviour with herself.

"There's one thing to be done," she said in a businesslike manner. "And that is to make sure of the General not sending on the report."

Sir Herbert looked gloomy, and doubtful of the success of this manœuvre.

"I don't see——" he began.

"Why, you goose, of course we must get at Lady Ockerley, and make her prevent him doing it!" cried Mrs. Eden. "I don't mind going for you a bit. The old girl and I are great friends."

Sir Herbert was not intelligent, but he had a certain cunning of his own.

"No," he said, "I'll go."

A plan of campaign opened itself out before him at once. It might call for diplomatic ability above that which he possessed, but he had perfect confidence in himself.

He turned to begin at once to put his plan into execution.

Mrs. Eden, meanwhile, with that odd candour which characterised her, repeated the whole of this conversation to Lady Blanche, unheeding the fact that Torquil MacLean was included in her audience.

"It is very extraordinary to think of such things being possible," remarked Lady Blanche to Torquil later. She was a good deal shocked by the whole episode as recounted by Mrs. Eden, and showed it in her voice.

"Such things as——?" returned Torquil interrogatively.

"Why, as a man being turned out of his regiment because of one woman, and kept in it

because of another. Surely the only reason for a man being made to leave the army is his being a bad soldier?"

"If it were not so impertinent, I should like to say: Bless your innocence!" said Torquil. "It is generally a much more personal reason than that which spoils men's careers."

"But one feels it ought not to be," insisted Blanche. "Why should women have any say in the matter? They have got no concern in the army, and they ought to leave it alone."

"No doubt they ought—theoretically," assented Torquil; "but women always have been fond of interfering, and always will be."

"Not all women!" cried Blanche. "A business man's wife does not try to meddle with her husband's business, or a doctor's wife with her husband's patients; or a lawyer's wife with her husband's clients. Why should a general's wife interfere with her husband's officers? It's absurd—and quite wrong."

"If my favourite bugbear, the system of recommendations, were done away with," suggested Torquil, "women's interference would at any rate be decreased. If there were no possibility of showing favouritism, it would not be worth anyone's while to try and get things by influence instead of merit. Of course," he added, "it

would be very difficult to arrange; in fact, it would be almost impossible, because *ce que femme veut, Dieu veut*, and women don't do as much harm as people say they do."

"I think people always do harm when they meddle with what does not concern them," said Blanche seriously.

"Well, in this instance we are observing," answered Torquil, "as Mrs. Eden was to blame for Flinton's predicament, it seems to me that the best she could do was to suggest a remedy. And, as it happened, she suggested the best possible under the present system."

Blanche sighed.

"There is something wrong in the system," she remarked.

Torquil smiled at the obviousness of this conclusion.

"Yet there are plenty of men in the army who would not have it changed," he said. "It does cut two ways, you see. Without it, one might not be able to get rid of objectionable fellows—of whom, I regret to say, every regiment has its full complement."

"Of course, there are two opinions about objectionableness," remarked Blanche.

"Of course there are, and one must be prepared to be objectionable to somebody. In fact,

there are people one meets whose approval would be a positive insult."

Lady Blanche laughed.

"But after all," she went on, "likes and dislikes ought not to determine a man's career. A man may not come up to our standard of what is fitting and yet do his own particular work well, and it is that which signifies. Plenty of very good soldiers have been unpopular men."

"Like the General who once commanded the Scottish District and was always called the Nine of Diamonds because it is the Curse of Scotland," said Torquil, "and a great many other worthy gentlemen one might mention. But I should like to remark that they are usually very thick-skinned individuals, and are so determined to get to the top that they don't notice annoyances by the way, or think them worth while. A better man often fails where an inferior one who is more conceited succeeds. It is said that 'the world knows nothing of its greatest men.' I am sure, at any rate, that the army knows nothing of its best soldiers."

"It is very difficult to see what is to be done to set it right," said Lady Blanche. "If, as you say, on the one hand the system is good because it helps to get rid of objectionable people, on the other it seems to end only in getting rid of the

ones who are sensitive enough to know that they are objectionable to others, or the ones who cannot find some counter influence to set against their Colonel's."

"That cannot really be done," began Torquil.

"Sir Herbert seems to be going to do it," replied Blanche.

"I mean," said Torquil, "that though a Colonel cannot turn a man out of his regiment except by indirect means, such as making his life such a hell to him that he prefers to go rather than stand it, still no outside influence can help that man, for the Colonel can always prevent his getting anything better. Woolrich will in all probability be baffled in this attempt to get rid of Flinton, but if he bears malice he will always stand in his way hereafter."

"I don't suppose for a moment," replied Blanche shrewdly, "that Sir Herbert wants anything in the way of an appointment. I expect he only wants to stay where he is."

Which showed that Lady Blanche had intuition.

Sir Herbert conducted his own case with Lady Ockerley with considerable adroitness. He managed to give her the impression that he was a martyr to Mrs. Eden's inordinate vanity. That he thereby betrayed the woman who had at any

rate made the suggestion of a way out of his difficulties, did not trouble his conscience in the least. He cheerfully made of Mrs. Eden's reputation a ladder by which to climb to safety.

"I'm an awfully unlucky devil, Lady Ockerley," he observed in a sentimental voice. "I've always wanted to be with nice women, and to marry a nice girl and settle down. But when a fellow is left, as I was, without a father and with a lot of money and a handle, don't you know, he's simply a mark for the other sort of women to shoot at."

It was almost incredible that Lady Ockerley, who would not have believed in any excuses for a woman's errors, should have swallowed this camel of an untruth without straining. But it remains that she did.

"I don't remember my mother, Lady Ockerley," murmured Sir Herbert unctuously. "I've no doubt I'd have been a different fellow if I could remember my mother."

The deceased lady in question had been a barmaid whose virtue before marriage was open to doubt, and whose life afterwards was too short to prove whether it would have borne the strain of the legal tie. But Lady Ockerley was unaware of these facts, and it is not impossible that Sir Herbert was too, the events in question having

taken place in a remote English country district before his birth.

Lady Ockerley was delighted with the pedestal to which Sir Herbert gave her to understand he had elevated her. She had had quantities of flirtations of greater or less violence, both before and after marriage, but never, even during the dazzling days of the honeymoon, when the quartermaster's daughter was basking in the prestige of having made the best marriage of anyone in her circle, did a man tell her she was his ideal woman. Which proves that David, indeed, spoke in haste when he averred that all men are liars.

She did not pause to ask herself what was Sir Herbert's ideal. She took it for granted that it was something so high and noble that even the glittering position of "General's Lady" could not fail to borrow from it additional lustre. Meanwhile, she graciously accepted such desirable homage, adopted towards Sir Herbert the somewhat mixed attitude of a mother and a goddess, gave him a great deal of advice, which he listened to with upturned eyes and an expression of adoration, and did everything he asked her with a promptitude which amazed him. Incidentally, she asked a great many questions about Mrs. Eden's private life, and he hastened to gratify her curiosity by scandalous revelations, crediting himself

with having the best reasons for knowing them to be true. Lady Ockerley's sole regret during this pleasant phase of affairs was that her daughter was for the time being engaged to a young gentleman in the artillery who wanted Sir Arthur's influence to help him on to the staff, and that the sweet blossom of womanhood in question never allowed any interference in her love affairs. Otherwise, could highly placed matron, who has an example to set to a whole station full of inferior women, married and single, wish for a more suitable son-in-law than Sir Herbert Flinton?

I think that I have mentioned that Sir Arthur Ockerley administered the affairs of the troops under his command strictly under approval of the senior partner of the firm. The result of Sir Herbert's manoeuvre was therefore a foregone conclusion, and the unfavourable report was not sent on. But Sir Herbert was not in the least grateful to Mrs. Eden.

CHAPTER XIII

THE month of April gave the signal for a general exodus from Pultanpore. Old *habitues* terrified new-comers with stories of the horrors the luckless dweller in the Plains might expect during the hot weather, and these, under fire of such appalling reminiscences, broke and fled trembling in all directions. Simla formed the goal of most feminine desires. A few affluent civilians went "home," as did Ethel Woolrich.

"I hope they are booking her as Mrs. Something-or-other," remarked Mrs. Eden, "otherwise I am sure there will be a scandal."

Mrs. Eden and Mrs. Culloch carried their feud to a wider field. Mrs. Woolrich was wafted to the hills in a dream of orange-blossom and white satin. One or two devoted or penniless wives remained with their husbands. Mrs. Gillespie joined the party to Cashmir made up by the Charlesworths, Torquil MacLean, and Donald.

They started in the best of spirits, after the first regret that Captain Gillespie's duties as an adjutant

prevented his leaving Pultanpore. But for this untimely circumstance, which, after all, chiefly affected his wife only, all went well until they reached Rawul Pindi. There a telegram was handed to Captain MacLean.

He had scarcely opened it when the table by which he was standing leapt into the air under a blow from his fist.

The others looked up amazed.

"Wired for back," he explained briefly, handing the telegram to Donald, who was standing nearest to him.

"Please, Mrs. Gillespie, let me swear for a few minutes!" ejaculated Donald.

"Who is it—your adjutant? Disgraceful! Hector would not dream of doing anything so mean. Why in the world, if they wanted you not to go, did they allow you to start?" inquired Mrs. Gillespie, with an air of mild exasperation at the perverseness of "Them," while both Blanche and Bertram exclaimed with varying degrees of emphasis that it was a "shame."

Donald walked up and down the room with his hands in his pockets and the Berserkar look on his face. No doubt he longed for someone to hammer.

"Don't they give any reason?" asked Bertram.

"Cartmell—he's my subaltern—has 'gone

sick,' they say," returned Torquil, who was taking the news much more quietly than his companions.

"Stoopid fool, what did he want to go sick for now?" grumbled Bertram.

"How wanton of him!" observed Mrs. Gillespie.

"That's not all!" let out Donald in an explosive manner; he shut his mouth with a snap on the words as if afraid to let more escape him.

"What does he mean?" asked Blanche of Torquil.

"Probably that Cartmell's getting ill is only an excuse, I daresay. I was surprised at getting leave; I can't say I am surprised at being recalled."

"But why should they do that?" asked Blanche, with round eyes.

"Oh, to annoy me."

"And then men say it is only women that are spiteful!" remarked Mrs. Gillespie, with the significant eyebrows raised.

"I hope," said Donald, stopping short in his tiger walk by her chair and speaking with a sudden descent into his deadly gentleness, "that you don't consider some of the senior officers in our regiment that I could mention representative specimens of *men*?"

"I must say," remarked Mrs. Gillespie to Torquil, "that you do take it with angelic good temper. You are much less upset about it than Mr. MacKenzie."

"You see, I am more accustomed than he is to the way they have in the army," he returned. "Why, apart from any intention to be malicious, such as we all know our gallant Colonel to have, this sort of thing is always happening. One is always having one's leave cancelled, or being recalled from leave, or something of the kind, so you'll have to get used to it, Donald."

"It won't happen more than once to me, I know that," remarked Donald in the tone of a very distant thunderstorm.

Later—staring at Torquil's retreating train from the Rawul Pindi platform—he said a good deal more for Lady Blanche's private ear alone.

"I hate the army," he remarked in the concentrated tone of one descended from the kind of men who handed blood feuds to the third and fourth generation.

"Why, I thought," said Lady Blanche, to whom Donald had found time to talk a good deal, "that you always wished to be a soldier ever since you were a little boy, and were so keen about fighting?"

"So I was."

"Then what has changed you all of a sudden?"

"It is not quite all of a sudden. I began to notice things wrong very soon after I joined, and I have been thinking about it a great deal. I don't suppose I should have thought so much if it had not been for MacLean."

"He has talked to you about it, then?"

"No. Not much. He doesn't talk a great deal. But I've seen things."

The expression of his voice sounded as if he had been a spectator of the tortures of the Inquisition at least.

Lady Blanche led him on.

"What sort of things?"

"Oh, the sort of things colonels can do if they want to be nasty. You don't know how they can put everything on to one man if they want to. If there's any dirty work to do, it's left to MacLean. If anybody's leave is to be stopped, it's MacLean's. If there's any small thing he doesn't like—it doesn't matter how small—it is always done to annoy him. They won't any of them talk to him if they can help it, for fear of being in the colonel's black books. I'm about the only fellow who ever so much as asks him to play a game of billiards or cards. I've seen them come in to dinner, and go and sit anywhere

but beside MacLean. I've come in and gone straight to the chair next him hundreds of times."

"I'm sure you have!" cried Lady Blanche, fired by the generous indignation in his voice. "Do you know," she added, "unless you had told me, and I know you to be absolutely truthful, I could scarcely have believed that men would do such things? I thought only women descended to such small ways of annoying each other—yes, and not even grown-up women either, only underbred schoolgirls."

"I shouldn't have believed it myself unless I had seen it," said Donald. "I can understand hating a man if he has done anything to you or to anyone you are fond of. I can understand killing him if it is bad enough, and I wouldn't think any harm of it. I can understand punching a man's head if he annoys you, and shaking hands afterwards. But I don't understand taking a sort of spite against a man and doing every beastly little trivial thing you can think of to annoy him. I don't understand cutting and boycotting a man who has never done you any harm in order to please another man who may do you some good some day. I don't understand calling people names behind their backs that you would be afraid to call them to their face."

"But do you know," said Lady Blanche, after a short silence, during which Donald really looked very alarming, "I don't think you ought to put the disgraceful behaviour of one regiment down to the army as a whole."

Donald considered this question carefully before he answered it.

"One has to judge of the world in general, and one's own corner of it in particular at first hand," he argued. "If the things which I hate are possible in one section of the army, I don't see that their being improbable in another section of the army exonerates the army as a whole. Such things ought not to be possible at all."

"The world ought to be perfect, my dear boy ; but it is not," said Lady Blanche.

Donald looked at her so seriously that she repented having jested even so gently with him. He evidently did not understand it.

"It is lucky for me," he said at last, "that they did not recall me as well as MacLean. The outfit to go to Cashmir costs a hundred pounds. I daresay that doesn't sound much to you, but it is a lot to me, and I expect it is something to MacLean, for we Scotch lairds are not too flush of hundreds here and hundreds there."

"It is very inconsiderate of Colonel Jenkins and his adjutant," remarked Lady Blanche.

"I don't think they did it from thoughtlessness by any means," returned Donald, as they left the station.

Torquil returned from Pultanpore with considerably less rancour than Donald carried with him to Cashmir. He believed his recall to be an act of aggression quite as firmly as Donald did, "but then what can you expect from such people?" he asked Hector Gillespie, with a shrug of his shoulders.

Torquil was inured from infancy to reverses. All his life he had seen his heart's desire vanishing before it was grasped, and at least the one thing this untoward fortune taught him was to accept it philosophically. His parents were very religious people, of the type which by making religion as gloomy and unpalatable as possible conduces more to the furtherance of atheism than any other form of teaching, however secular. These votaries are enthusiastic in the praise of self-denial; but they are more careful to exact it of their compulsory disciples than to set them a good example. They never dream of denying themselves the acute pleasure of being disagreeable.

The chief impression which remained to Torquil of his youth was that Protestant Christianity was of all forms of belief the most forbidding

and the least in conformity with the precepts of its titular Founder. His parents were ardent supporters of missionary enterprise. Their method of religious education for their children, however, was of the kind calculated to incline them, if thoughtful and speculative, to unbelief, if impressionable and artistic, to Catholicism. Hamish MacLean, the elder, hated an atheist only one degree less than he hated a Papist. He died ignorant that he had done his utmost in his generation to encourage these two forms of belief or unbelief. He was also a believer in the right divine of parents, and having settled his children's futures without any reference to their capacities, left at his death his property to his widow, with full power to embarrass it up to the hilt, which of course she did, and to leave it in whatever proportion among her children which she thought proper.

The obvious result of this was the kind of division among his family which questions of money can alone engender. Torquil, who was the youngest, and at Sandhurst at the time of his perspicacious father's demise, remembered the second period of his youth chiefly by the battles royal among his brethren, as the balance of favour with the minister ~~golden~~ mother trembled between them. ~~There~~ ~~was~~ ~~no~~ ~~question~~ in

this atmosphere of uncertainty of the youngest of five meeting with anything but constant thwarting and disappointment.

A generous nature will not brook such a state of things, and the more hot-blooded of the family in one last furious scene requested the remaining members to recollect the trenchant remarks of St. Peter to Simon the Sorcerer, and went off at a tangent. His mother's favourite son became a Jesuit, and the younger daughter made a runaway marriage with a man who was notoriously agnostic. Mrs. MacLean held her other children accountable for these occurrences, which she alleged to have broken her heart. The house of Bogieshalloch became an intolerable one to live in. The eldest son emigrated and took his remaining sister with him to keep his house. Torquil joined his regiment, and spent his leave anywhere but at home. Mrs. MacLean, indignant, after the manner of her kind, at having to reap as she had sown, let the place and took a suburban villa, where she enjoyed the semi-clerical society her soul loved.

This youth made of Torquil a man of ice and iron, but in depriving him of faith and hopefulness it destroyed his initiative. He got on all right when things were going well, but when they went ill it never occurred to him to oppose any-

thing to them but dead weight. A high-spirited colt will lash out and rear up to rid himself of an undesirable burden, but the old hunter whose heart has been broken only hangs on to his bit in the sullen hope of wearing the hated rider out by sheer persistent passivity. The colt sometimes succeeds, the old horse never, without the assistance of outside events.

Meanwhile dead weight is the kind of opposition which the human race in general loathes. To exasperate the enemy to madness, and then see him commit some suicidal folly, is what it really desires. A man who will not lose his temper, however much he is provoked, will be hated a hundred times more bitterly than a perfect demon of ferocity.

A regiment loves to try and find out the limit of a subaltern's endurance. Now and again it lights on a subaltern like Donald MacKenzie, who is dangerous when his limit is reached; and it fears him like the pestilence, but respects him. The average subaltern who loses his temper is not usually a peril to all comers, and he gives the best sport to his tormentors, and earns a species of affection on that count. The man who has not got any temper to lose may be popular, but the man who has a temper, and keeps it, as it were, behind bared teeth is invariably hated.

A regiment's method of proving subalterns' tempers is usually a coarse one. It takes a concrete and corporeal form. It may, to the observer, seem unworthy of grown men, as the average officer and gentleman is assumed by the eye of the law to be, but it is not often ill-natured. The irresponsible provers of temper have no deliberate intention of being brutal, though brutal they often succeed in being, nevertheless. But they "mean no harm," which must be held an extenuating circumstance for the harm they sometimes manage to do. They sometimes do good into the bargain. For though it is assumed that the education of a young man at the age of twenty and upwards would be complete, it very often needs a coping-stone.

The process which supplies this usually hurts no one but those whom it is impossible to improve.

Most subalterns pass through their ordeal of fire with credit, and find it really to be of short duration. An occasional specimen, however, finds himself opposed to a deliberate attempt to get rid of him out of the regiment. Now it is not easy for a man's brother officers to get rid of him. If his first three annual confidential reports do not report him as a hopelessly bad officer and an incubus on His Majesty's taxpayers, even the

colonel of the regiment can only abolish him by indirect means. There have been tough-skinned subjects who have borne with all the ingenious torments the minds of their contemporary sub-alterns can devise, and who have worn out the disapproval of every succeeding colonel till they reached the pinnacle when they had no colonel to wear out. But for one of these rhinoceros-like adventurers, there have been hundreds who have found it less trouble to succumb.

Now it happened to Torquil that he had never disapproved himself to his equals before the succession to the command of Colonel Jenkins. But during the war it pleased Heaven to remove by means of enteric, dysentery, or Boer bullets the majority of his friends in the regiment, and to preserve his enemies. Providence also, with more than usual inscrutability, sent him home sick, and kept him there. During the hiatus he lost touch with his regiment, and returned to find it full of hostile strangers. The obvious and physical compulsion commonly employed on sub-alterns as a means of drawing their attention to the desirability of their removal to other spheres cannot with any propriety be brought to bear on a captain. But though women are usually more adept than men in inflicting mental torture, the stronger sex occasionally rise to the occasion

and display no mean ingenuity in devising expedients to worry the mind and break the heart of an enemy.

Colonel Jenkins lay, like the ungodly in the Psalms, in thievish corners of the streets, turning his eyes down to the ground in a long-sustained attempt to catch Torquil tripping in his duty. He did not succeed, partly because Torquil knew his work thoroughly, and partly because he was on his guard. But the process was trying to Torquil's nerves, because no human being can be always on the watch without suffering, any more than he can be always awake.

Women can put up with what they do not like for a long time. There are so many circumstances in the lives of women which must be borne with what patience the individual woman can muster, and she knows it from her cradle. But men are not so enduring. It is quite proper. They are "men, and masters of their fate." They are intended to fight with circumstances, not to submit to them. No one ever yet disgusted a woman with life by making it difficult, but the process succeeds to admiration with the lords of creation.

With the hot weather coming on, half the officers away, and a detachment of the regiment in the hills, there were plenty of irksome occupa-

tions which Colonel Jenkins made haste to allot to Torquil.

It might appear to the onlooker that some of these required the training of an accountant's office or of a grocer's shop rather than the ostensibly military education imparted to the cadets at Sandhurst, or the militia subalterns destined to blossom into regular officers. The office of president of the canteen is not coveted by anybody, entailing as it does an amount of accuracy which few young men possess, and an amount of drudgery which still fewer are anxious to undertake. This includes the keeping of very complicated balance-sheets and the responsibility for considerable sums of money; a continuous counting, weighing, and measuring of all the stores in the canteen; and frequently making up from the president's own resources of articles and coin wasted by others.

Torquil had not received a commercial education, but he had what is better still, the commercial instinct; and though this work bored him, he got through it with absolute accuracy. Some men in his position would have been driven to suicide by long columns of figures during the hot weather, but he remained almost unworried.

"Somebody must do it, I suppose," was his reply when the adjutant, a colourless individual

called Thomas, made some remark on the probable distastefulness of this work.

The hot weather in India does not of itself improve anybody's health or spirits. The Lord did not intend white men to live in India, as He showed very plainly by peopling it with black ones; so the white men in question have to bear the consequences of their own actions like the rest of us, and they exist miserably and in a varying state of moisture, battling with insects and cursing punka-coolies for six months of the Indian year.

For the first three months of the six the clergyman of the station went on leave. Colonel Jenkins, on being desired to detail an officer to perform such priestly duties as were unavoidable, of course selected Torquil. Torquil read services with an inward wonder whether these ministrations were calculated to benefit anybody's soul, and what was the ultimate object of making religious observance so distasteful. But he found the funerals the worst trial.

Funerals took place at the rate of one a day, and no amount of custom can ever make a military one unimpressive. The sounds which are associated with it, the "Dead March in Saul" and "The Last Post," the "Flowers of the Forest" wailing from the pipes, the volleys over

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the grave, can never fail to ring on the ear with fresh significance.

What with the wearisome work, the nerve-destroying weather, and the funerals, it may be imagined what a cheerful effect the three months of April, May, and June, Anno Domini 1902, had on Torquil's feelings.

CHAPTER XIV

IT was about the middle of the hot weather, when Torquil was beginning to realise the feelings of the fanatics who had perished by means of slow martyrdom, that peace was declared, and it may safely be said that on no ear throughout the expectant empire did "that blessed word peace" fall with a more grateful sound.

As to Hector Gillespie, I believe he really did shed tears of joy.

"The end is in sight at last," he wrote to his wife. "I am sending in my papers to-night. I shall come up to join you on the 1st (of July), and the only thing left for me to wish is, that I may bring Torquil with me. He is beginning to look like a gargoyle in a drought, and I believe he has had one of the worst times a man ever had outside hell . . . I hope you realise how very nice it is of me to be sitting here writing to you, when I want to go out and scream 'Peace is declared !' at the top of my voice for several hours, for all the people to hear. I feel only a shade less pleased

than I did on my wedding-day, and two or three degrees more than when they told me I had passed into the army fifth on the list."

On Colonel Woolrich Captain Gillespie's resignation of his commission came as a fearful blow, and he wasted much valuable time in imploring his quondam adjutant to reconsider his decision. He even offered to do all he could in the way of recommending him for a billet on the staff.

The only reply was a carolling of "Too late ! too late !" from Hector Gillespie, whose delighted aspect was incomprehensible to Colonel Woolrich.

Colonel Jenkins's only comment on receiving Torquil MacLean's papers, was that, of course, pending their acceptance, Torquil must not expect any leave, and as they had to go to England, Captain Gillespie joined his wife alone. The Highland Colonel and Adjutant went on leave themselves at the half-term, and Torquil was appointed acting adjutant in Captain Thomas's stead. Major MacCorquodale was in command, having returned in a very bad temper, which even dramatic amorous triumphs in Simla failed to assuage, and to which the climate of Pultanpore in July only added fuel. He complained bitterly of being "stuck" in a place where there were no women except the riding-master's wife.

Bertram Charlesworth also came back on the 1st of July. He left Lady Blanche with Mrs. Gillespie in a villa at Srinagar, and himself returned laden with the spoils of the chase, and in company with Donald MacKenzie. There was a general interchange with the officers at Pultanpore, with the exception of Torquil. The civilians were mostly away, but Dr. Puam's flaming red beard still seemed to concentrate half the heat of India in its aggressive bristles, and to carry it into whatever company he honoured.

Donald stepped into Captain Gillespie's shoes as the chief—if not the only—person Torquil had to exchange ideas with. Young Eileandoran was an extremely serious-natured young man, and on the whole preferred the society of his seniors to that of his contemporaries. The person in the world whom he regarded with most respect and affection was "my father," who seems to have made companions of his sons from their infancy. Eileandoran's knowledge and views of life might have appeared to some people as out of date; but he was an interesting man, and after him the average modern person with neither ideas of his own nor command of language with which to clothe them was decidedly flat and tasteless.

"Women," remarked Donald suddenly one evening, "marry very odd men."

"Just found that out, have you?" said Torquil, smiling.

"I was thinking of Lady Blanche," said Donald. "I cannot imagine why she married Charlesworth. I don't object to Charlesworth; he is **very** good-natured. Some of these Lancer fellows **never** forget that they are captains, and that you are a subaltern. Great nonsense, for they were subalterns themselves once, and would be still, if it wasn't for the war. Charlesworth isn't like that. But I don't believe he and Lady Blanche have an idea in common."

"Perhaps not," returned Torquil. "But there is such a thing as the attraction of opposites, you know."

Donald pondered this platitude.

"I would not marry a woman who liked nothing I liked," he remarked at last.

"It is rather dangerous to say you 'won't' do this or that in matters of marriage," philosophised Torquil, "because you generally end by doing the **very** thing you said you wouldn't. But what sort of woman do you think you would marry?"

"I shall marry a woman who never laughs," said Donald deliberately.

Torquil himself laughed.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "The future Mrs. MacKenzie will be cheery company, then."

Donald remained unmoved.

"Women make such a noise when they laugh—always out of tune," he complained. "They show every tooth in their head and the gums besides. And then they do laugh at such foolish things."

Another day he remarked:

"Lady Blanche hates India. She likes the country at home and quiet lonely places. How she would like Eileandoran! She has promised to come there some day."

"India is not much of a country for a lady," observed Torquil. "It is a capital place for a bachelor, though."

"Do you think so?" said Donald. "I hate the country. I have seen nothing here to equal the view at Eileandoran, when you look out over the sea towards the islands and back up the glen to the deer forest. They can't beat the sunsets there anywhere."

"There's more colour in Scotland than any other country in the world," exclaimed the other Highlander.

"And I don't see any buildings here which equal our old castles," added Donald.

"But of course the sport here——" began Torquil.

"Nothing to a good grouse drive at Eilean-

doran," returned the heir of that domain, "and talk of *mahseer*, why I wouldn't look at them alongside a good fresh-run salmon in one of our best pools."

"But everybody hasn't got an Eileandoran to fall back upon," said Torquil, smiling.

"You must go up there when you go back. You'll be there before I can be," said Donald wistfully. "I shall certainly," he added after a pause, "persuade my father not to send Rory into the army, as he intended. I wanted to be a soldier because of active service, but I have come to the conclusion that nowadays you can go and fight, if you want to, better if you are not a regular. Rory wouldn't care for soldiering, and he would lose his temper with the fellows in the regiment, for Rory is very particular about the fellows he meets."

The elderly manner in which he made these statements made Torquil laugh again.

"And I suppose you flatter yourself that you are always as cool as a cucumber with the fellows in the regiment?" he inquired.

"No, I don't say that," answered Donald, in the tone of one making a concession. "I was very angry with them when first I came, and I am glad I was, for I would have had sooner or later to show them I won't have any nonsense, so it was a

good thing to get it over. I get on with them all right now—but the majority of them are not what I call gentlemen, you know,” confidentially. “In fact, there are some of the men I would a great deal rather have as friends if I could. There are several gentlemen in my company. I never could understand how gentlemen could go through the ranks; I always thought it must be hellish.”

“I shouldn’t care particularly to do it myself,” remarked Torquil. “Rather an amusing thing once happened with a gentleman ranker in the regiment before I joined. He was late for parade and made the excuse to the Colonel that he had been brushing his teeth. ‘What!’ said the Colonel, who had been a private himself years before, ‘I thought it was only women that brushed their teeth.’”

“Horrid fellow!” commented Donald. “How glad I am I never had to serve under him! Even Jenkins is not so bad as that.”

“I believe he was a good soldier, though, and not a bad fellow otherwise,” returned Torquil, unwilling to admit any superiority on Colonel Jenkins’s part. “He was given his choice between a commission and a V.C., and he chose the commission. Very sensible of him, I call it; he became a general. That’s the kind of man

who gets on in the service—the kind that's not squeamish about anything."

"I should have thought the men hated one of themselves being promoted over them," remarked Donald.

"They didn't in this case. He was amazingly popular, all the more so for being one of the 'people.' He came to a bad end, though, because his head got turned, and he got above himself and thought he could do anything. So he ended by getting into trouble, and shot himself to avoid being cashiered. The end of that story's not lively."

"None of your stories about the army are," remarked Donald.

"I don't know. I think I have told you no end of amusing ones. Not at this time of year, though, after taking several funerals in a week. By the way, how seedy Charlesworth looks! I believe he's got fever."

Donald looked up as if he were going to say something, but changed his mind.

Up in the hills, peace meant to Lady Blanche a prospect of seeing Heribert again, and to Mrs. Gillespie liberty. So the events which make history come down into very small personal questions to obscure units in a nation. War, like a great many other things which sound

very glorious when we are not personally concerned in them, has rather a pitiful glamour, after all, for it is wrung out of the heart's anguish of women. One may thoroughly realise in theory and even bravely make up one's mind to the fact that all good things are worth sacrifice. But that does not diminish the bitterness of the sacrifice. And what does it profit a woman that the Empire is saved and the honour of its sons exculpated, if the light of her eyes is taken from her?

Those that have put this cup to their lips, even if they have not drunk deep of it, are not anxious to taste it again. The greatest awards of glory do not seem worth the bitter savour of that draught.

Mrs. Gillespie was not the sort of woman who is usually pitied, because she bore trouble and anxiety in silence, and seemed sufficient unto herself. But in the moment of relief from tension, she gave Lady Blanche a glimpse of all that she had suffered during those three long years; and Blanche heard her with a *serrement de cœur*.

So they were very happy up in the hills, planning all the wonderful and delightful things they should do when they "went home."

"But I shall have to come out again," said Lady Blanche, sighing.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Gillespie. "That just spoils it, doesn't it? Now to me everything looks simply golden, because all the troubles are behind, and there is nothing whatever to come that is disagreeable that I know of. But take heart! Your husband may get tired of soldiering."

"He may," said Blanche doubtfully. "He does grumble a good deal, but I don't think he ever dreams of giving it up. He thinks he would have nothing to do if he left the army."

"Heavens! fancy anybody in this wide splendid world, and every day only twelve hours long instead of twenty-four, talking of having nothing to do! Why, Hector and I feel that we shall be tottering into our graves before we have done a quarter of the things we want to. Think what a lot of pictures and places there are to see, music to hear, books to read—alone."

"But Bertie does not care about them," objected Lady Blanche.

"And I want to have gardens and farms all of my own, and watch the flowers and the baby animals grow," cried Mrs. Gillespie. "I want a house of my very own to play with, and," she

added in a more subdued voice, "I want a nursery of my very own too."

The pain which shot through Lady Blanche was almost unbearable.

"And Hector wants to spend the whole year shooting, and then the whole year over again writing books, and going into Parliament, and round the world, and taking motor-cars to pieces and putting them together again, and inventing all manner of new machinery, and making all his own furniture with his own blessed fingers, and discovering the elixir of life and the philosopher's stone in his own laboratory," ran on Mrs. Gillespie, laughing from sheer light-heartedness, "and, you see, there's not time in one man's life to do it all, is there? Besides, all the countries in the world are still to be seen."

"India not included, I suppose?" observed Lady Blanche.

"I don't know about that. I think I should like to come out again as a tourist for a cold weather or part of it."

"Come and look me up, then," said Lady Blanche, with rather a dreary laugh.

"Oh, but you will be at home long before that," Mrs. Gillespie assured her.

"What, fourteen years hence? What a lively prospect!"

"You will have been home nearly every hot weather, I expect. I don't suppose you'll ever care to go to Simla. Besides, something may turn up."

Lady Blanche afterwards told her that this was an ill-omened thing to say. But at the moment Mrs. Gillespie spoke out of sheer gaiety. She had not an idea of what was really about to happen.

It was in the middle of September that Lady Blanche got the letter telling her that Bertram was ill with enteric. She instantly prepared to go back to Pultanpore, though the letter was perfectly reassuring. The attack, it said, was very slight ; he was in no danger, and she was not on any account to "worry." But she went back in spite of it.

Pultanpore was steaming and odorous. To Lady Blanche it was like going down into the infernal regions without the motive which spurred Orpheus. Duty has not the wings of love ; but it carries some people almost as far.

She found Bertram disposed to grumble at her for coming back, and at the doctors for keeping him in bed. She wondered why she had been in such a hurry, and could only explain it by the knell-like sound "enteric" had in all ears newly accustomed to the casualty lists of the war. It was such a common thing in India, she was

told. There was nothing to be the least frightened about. She shook her head and smiled at the explanation. She was always frightened of coming short in her duty.

After the first, Bertram admitted that he was pleased to see her, and that lying in bed was "devilish dull." Of the eventual outcome of his illness he never had a moment's doubt. He talked cheerfully about the peace, and what they would do when they went "home."

"Pity the regiment's going to lose Gillespie," he remarked. "I think myself that he was in too great a hurry. But he always said he would go, didn't he? He hasn't got on as an able fellow like him should. Sours a man, that sort of thing does."

He talked a great deal on this topic, and insisted on regarding Captain Gillespie as a disappointed man.

"What will he do with himself now? Mope, I suppose," he remarked.

Lady Blanche thought the Gillespies' outlook much less dreary than her own, but naturally refrained from saying so. It seemed to please Bertram to think that Captain Gillespie had resigned in haste to repent at leisure, and he frequently compared this hapless lot with his own, with which he was supremely content.

"I was always a lucky fellow," he remarked.

In this frame of mind he approached the crisis of his illness, the frame of mind which had chiefly characterised him all his life—of confidence and self-satisfaction. It was not till the evening of the crucial day that the doctors looked grave, and hinted to Lady Blanche that all was not so well as it should be. From that moment it all came on Lady Blanche with a lightning rapidity. Whether Bertram knew the danger or not she never knew, for he showed no signs of it. There were twenty and four terrible hours during which all that he represented to her and had been to her seemed to return overwhelmingly to her mind, and the happiness of her whole life seemed to be threatened; during which she realised that he was dearer to her than she thought, and during which she suffered as she never imagined herself capable of suffering.

It was in the dawning hours of the first anniversary of her wedding-day that they told her she was a widow.

That evening when the news reached the hills, two women set out to come to her. They met in her drawing-room, where she was sitting, too stunned to realise what had happened to her. They talked to her, tended her, ministered silently to her half-unexpressed wants, and took care of

her with a tenderness sisters rarely show to each other. Their gentleness and thoughtfulness made the men, who felt their previous attempts at consolation had been so clumsy, tell each other that women were wonderful with one another.

The one was Mrs. Gillespie, and the other was Mrs. MacGusty.

CHAPTER XV

TIME, the great healer, has a rival or understudy in the sea. It is wonderful what the mere fact of balancing on the great mother's bosom will do for the wrecked minds and broken hearts of those who happen to be good sailors. Out in the immensities, with one above and the other below, the world seems very small and far away, and the troubles which so wrung them fade into the pallor of non-existence. The mere cessation of daily posts and newspapers brings that sense of remoteness which of itself is consolation. Here can they rest, the battered in life's warfare, cradled in the long swing of the waves, while the salt wind and the sun bring them new life, and with it new hope.

There can never be any repose as long as the mind is troubled with a sense of values. But out at sea the value of time and money so fades that the mind loses sight of it and can relax. A day here is a thousand years, and a thousand years a

day, and nothing matters so long as the sun shines.

The gulf of the sea was what Lady Blanche put between her old life and her new. She passed it as a married woman, and repassed it again as a widow; and the sea blotted out all that seemed sad and wrong in it, and left only a tender memory.

On the liner which conveyed her from Bombay to England, she even began, after the first, to rise again from the ashes of her sorrow in which she had been sitting. At first bitterly self-reproachful, accusing herself of not having been all she might to her husband, she came at last, with the kiss of sun and wind driving away all morbid fancies, to a better and more peaceful mind. At first beating against the bars of Fate, she came during the long nights when she lay listening to the throb of the engines and the swaying of the waves, to acquiesce in the doctrine that "whatever is, is best." At first resolved to mourn all her days, she began to lift up her head to the sting of the flying spray and remember that life can give as much or more to those who are willing to receive than it can take away. Her drifting apart from Bertram was at first the chief sting in her grief. But she grew later to know that it was its antidote. In after years, when she looked back on her life, she recog-

nised that her marriage to Bertram was a mere incident in her education ; but on the liner that took her home from his graveside the time was not yet ripe for this appreciation of facts. She really believed herself broken-hearted.

But she could still feel the sun—both the actual god of day and that warmth of kindness which enveloped her.

It happened that Bertram had left Captain Gillespie co-executor with his widow, and as Blanche was too much stunned by the suddenness of her loss, and too unaccustomed at all times to all forms of business, the Gillespies had taken entire charge of her from the first. Hector Gillespie wound up all Bertram's affairs in Pultanpore, and Henrica made of herself such a staff to Blanche that her first longing for the sister Betty, who had always been her right hand, was assuaged. The Gillespies brought her home, and by taking all arrangements on themselves left her nothing to do but to profit by the healing influence of the sea and the sun. Helped by the tact of Mrs. MacGusty, they had guarded her carefully from the well-meaning condolences and the prying curiosity, to one or other of which everyone in the station was a prey ; they continued to ward off both from her on board, and they were always at hand for her to turn to as soon as she wanted them. Their own

happiness made them, instead of the most selfish, the most sympathetic of companions.

On the same boat was Torquil MacLean ; and though for the first few days he held aloof, shy of obtruding on Lady Blanche's grief, he ended by joining their little group. It did Blanche good to hear him and Captain Gillespie talking together ; to listen to their discussions and arguments took her out of herself.

Captain Gillespie would sooner talk to himself than not talk at all, and he very quickly took the hint his wife gave him to keep the conversation at a brisk rate in Lady Blanche's presence. By-and-by she became interested, joined in, asked questions, and gave opinions, and by degrees even a gentle gaiety pervaded their intercourse.

With them, too, was Donald MacKenzie, who was being sent home to the dépôt. As this was located in Scotland, he was supremely content and (when out of Lady Blanche's hearing) in hilarious spirits. In her presence he was even more serious than usual, and watched her like a faithful dog of great size, eager to anticipate her every wish and to show his sympathy by fetching and carrying for her. He would place her deck-chair for her every morning and stand guarding it, glaring at the passengers who occasionally stopped to stare at the young widow in

her deep black till they fled in dismay at his ferocious aspect. He sat next her at meals, and interposed his massive form between her and these inquisitive strangers, and erected a still more solid barrier between her and them by severely snubbing the mildest remark of his next-door neighbour. He deeply resented the well-meant civility of a man who picked up a handkerchief she had dropped, and frightened him away by his scowls. He would scarcely allow Gillespie or MacLean to do her any trifling service, and even looked on Mrs. Gillespie with a jaundiced eye.

They were almost into Marseille when Captain Gillespie remarked to his wife :

"I believe MacKenzie is in love with Lady Blanche."

"Dear Hector, it is too delightful to have you tell me such news !"

"Do you mean to say it struck you before ?" he inquired in a surprised tone.

"I saw it with half an eye months ago in Cashmir," she replied promptly.

"You never said so," he remarked resentfully.

"What was the object ?" she returned calmly.

"When I come to think of it, I don't know," he remarked. "But *now*, as it happens, with poor Charlesworth gone——"

And he paused, looking doubtfully at his wife.

"Captain Charlesworth never really suited her," returned Mrs. Gillespie briskly. "It was a shock to her, of course, his dying so suddenly; but she will get over it, and you may be sure she will marry again."

"Rather early days to think of it, though," remarked Captain Gillespie.

"Oh, but she isn't thinking of it!" cried Mrs. Gillespie. "I don't believe even Mr. MacKenzie does yet. Besides, a hundred and one things may happen before her first year of widowhood is out. And in any case it isn't our business. Meanwhile it is nice for her to have so willing an A.D.C. in waiting."

"I'm only wondering whether it isn't getting to be noticed by the other people on board," remarked Captain Gillespie. "It would be a pity if they made a talk about it. But I don't like to suggest to MacKenzie to go home by Marseille" (Lady Blanche and the Gillespies had arranged to go the whole voyage by sea). "I don't like to give that young man any advice, for fear of being knocked down."

"What a wonderful chaperon you will make for your daughter, when you have one, Hector!" remarked Mrs. Gillespie, laughing.

"It is a serious responsibility," he observed,

shaking his head solemnly. But he proffered no ill-advised suggestions to Donald, and the party journeyed on unbroken.

"Isn't it curious," remarked Mrs. Gillespie, the day before they got into Southampton, "to think that though we five people have practically seen each other every day for nearly a year, after to-day we shall be scattered, and perhaps never be all five together again?"

"Don't say that," said Donald. "I hope you will all four come and stay with me at Eileandoran next autumn."

"And long before that I hope you will all four come to Heribert," added Blanche.

"Besides, we might so far rise to the occasion as to meet in London," suggested Torquil.

"But it won't be the same thing, for there will have been a break," said Mrs. Gillespie, "and during the break we may change so much as to be quite different people; you and Mr. MacKenzie," she added to Torquil, with a mischievous twinkle in her eye, "may marry women Lady Blanche and I can't bear——"

"Oh, but they mustn't do that!" cried Blanche.

"I can promise for myself," muttered Donald.

"Hector may get so wrapped up in machinery that he will become an animated motor-car," proceeded Mrs. Gillespie.

"That sounds horribly complicated, not to say painful," broke in Captain Gillespie. "But why make these prophecies? I do think it unnecessary. Of course we may never—I think I may say I hope we may never—be planted down in a place where we five are the only people fit to speak to——"

"Oh, now you are hard on the poor people of Pultanpore," said Mrs. Gillespie.

"Hard, very possibly, but true, you can't deny."

"Some of the women were certainly very dreadful," remarked Lady Blanche.

"You can't blame them for that. Think of the sort of life the average middle-class woman lives, and how dull and restricted it must be! What poky houses they live in, and how few people they see! A party, even the dullest kind of party, is quite an event to them, and they think it exciting to go out to dinner. How can you blame them if, when they are let loose in India, with what seems to them a quantity of money and a great deal of society, their heads get a little bit turned?"

"You weren't so merciful when you were in among them, my dear," remarked her husband.

"Possibly not, because they were then actively engaged in boring me. But now, with a few

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thousand miles between us, I can make excuses for them all. I hope they will all get what they want. God bless them, and keep them out of my way from this time forth for evermore !”

“In short, you and the army have parted without the least regret, except that you had ever met,” chimed in Blanche.

“I can quite subscribe to that,” said Captain Gillespie. “I regret infinitely that the present system makes it useless for me to continue in the army any longer. I would gladly soldier all my days, if I was allowed to do so in an adequate manner. I love the army, I love the men ; there are no men like them ; particularly I love the non-commissioned officers. If I had been a great landowner, and could employ a thousand men on my estates, I should have wanted to bring the whole regiment back with me.”

“I should like to bring our Sergeant-Major,” remarked Torquil, “but I think I could do without the rest. I don’t know what I should do with them, but if it were the good old times, I should provide the Sergeant-Major with a billet as my private jester.”

“Isn’t he the man who, when he was falling in the men for church parade, said : ‘Chur-rch o’ Scotland to the right, Roman Catholics to the

left, and a' fancy releegions to the rear?' " asked Captain Gillespie.

"He was also the man who, after having cursed a private up hill and down dale, and called him all the foul names he could think of, ended up with: 'And, in fact, I think you're a horrible man!'" answered Torquil, and even Lady Blanche smiled.

"Well, but they *are* good fellows," resumed Captain Gillespie. "No, it's not the army I'm glad to be done with. It is the system on which the army is run. The inability to call his soul his own a man might get over, if it was made worth his while, for after all, unless you are rich, you can't possibly be really free. But when it is not made worth his while, when he is blocked all round from getting any good out of his profession, or doing any good in it, it is heart-breaking work, and he is well out of it."

"I suppose," ventured Lady Blanche, "that at any rate the system is better than it used to be when there was purchase."

"I don't think it is, as far as the right men getting on is concerned," returned Gillespie. "What people then obtained by paying down cash over the counter they now obtain by the mere fact of having got into the army by a certain date. The fact of age does not of itself

make a man a scrap more efficient in any way than the fact of possessing money."

"But as the regulations are generally made by old men and not by young ones, I suppose we cannot expect them to look at it in that light," remarked Blanche.

"Perhaps not. No, the army," pronounced Captain Gillespie, "is an excellent profession for the man who does not particularly want to get on in the world, but who wants to save himself from the reproach of being an idler at the expense of as little trouble to himself as possible. It is an excellent profession for the shirker, for he can get on nearly as well as the worker. It is excellent for the man with money who wants an occupation and is unable to make one for himself; and it is excellent for the middle-class men, who thereby gain a position which they could not attain otherwise. But as, personally, I do not happen to be any of those types of man, I am very glad to think I am out of it."

"All the same," he added a moment later, "if I had a son, and he did not display a marked bent for anything else, I should put him into the army, for I think it is an excellent school. If he is good for something else, I can encourage him to leave when he is grown up; and if he isn't it will keep him out of mischief."

"Then," said Donald, "would you advise me to leave?"

"Not yet," responded Gillespie. "And, of course, what I say I don't mean for fellows like you. You'll be a landowner, and you've got your duties to the land, and your duty to the nation. You'll marry in a few years' time, and that will be time enough for you to leave the service and devote yourself to the real business of your life. Which is to look after your tenants and to increase the Clan MacKenzie, so that your tenants may be provided with somebody to look after them when you're gone. It is career enough for any man to be a landowner, if he takes it seriously and does it properly. Meanwhile, it can't do you any harm to learn something about your fellow-men, and how to handle them; and of women and how to avoid the wrong ones. Time enough for you to leave when you marry. If you marry the right sort of woman, you'll do it of your own accord; and if you marry the wrong sort, well—God help you, for nobody else can."

Donald answered by a confident smile.

"As to Torquil," added Captain Gillespie, considering the subject of his remarks with a judicial eye, "I know him of old to be a man who won't take any advice, or I would give him yards. Because I very dearly love giving things, and

especially advice, and I do feel that I am so competent to arrange his life for him. But if I tried, he would probably go and do the exact opposite like the Irishman's pig."

"Thank you," said Torquil, "for your flattering comparisons. I have, however, a very good opinion of your advice, and I think it not at all impossible I might take some of it, if I heard it."

Captain Gillespie, however, declined to be drawn.

It was during the forenoon that they came into Southampton. They were none of them expecting to be met, and it was a delightful surprise to Lady Blanche when she met the kindly eye of her father and the sparkling one of Lady Betty, and heard the two voices which were the sound of home to her. She looked so glad for a moment that Donald conceived a rabid jealousy of the little group on the quay. Then there was a little scene of kisses and exclamations, and Lord Ewe was shaking hands with everybody, while Lady Betty only shook hands with Torquil MacLean and turned back hastily to her sister. And then to save the situation from becoming in any way sentimental or lachrymose, up hurried Lady Philippa de la Herne, followed by her son, the celebrated Guardsman, and a daughter.

"My dear Blanche!" she exclaimed in loud

tones, "my dear child ! I am too thankful to see you again safe."

And she proceeded to enfold her in so very enveloping an embrace that Lady Blanche disappeared from view for some moments.

Lord Ewe had a saloon carriage, and therein conveyed the whole party up to London. Lady Philippa was very condescending to Mrs. Gillespie until by skilful cross-examination and to that lady's infinite amusement, she succeeded in extracting the information "who she was" and in discovering that her origin was unexceptionable.

"Dear Philip," she turned to assure Lady Blanche, meaning her son, "insisted on coming down to meet you."

As a matter of fact it had struck dear Philip as a favourable opportunity for bringing himself again to the notice of his cousin Blanche, whom he had not seen for several years. It is unkind to suggest that if she had not been a well-dowered widow, he would not have thought it worth while to renew her acquaintance. He was directly responsible for one result of that train journey. He displayed considerable ingenuity in manœuvring the party into their seats, and contriving to allot Donald MacKenzie to his sister and Torquil MacLean to Lady Betty. Miss de la Herne was

so persevering a talker that she could be relied upon for button-holing her neighbour indefinitely. As to Lady Betty, she was a beauty and an heiress. Any man who would not spend a couple of hours flirting with her must be strangely blind to female attractions.

This Torquil MacLean was not. From the first moment of seeing on the quay a bright-eyed, sparkling face, framed in distractingly curly hair, he fell unconsciously but none the less helplessly in love on the spot.

There are people who assert that there is no such thing as love at first sight, and like most people who deal in generalities and expect human nature, which is notoriously contradictory, to conform to them, they are wrong. It is true that love at first sight is rarer than novelists would have us believe; also it is by no means certain to be mutual. But on this particular occasion she was flint to his steel, and her keen instinct knew a kindred spirit at a glance.

The way of love is a road along which one may saunter or travel by lightning speed just as one pleases. When you choose the latter course you are apt to leave your former friends and relations breathless and panting, and wondering how in the world you could get all that distance in such a short time.

Torquil and Lady Betty in the first five minutes got out beyond all arbitrary divisions of time. Perhaps they had been seeking each other throughout space ever since they parted on the steps of the world-old temple in the morning of the earth. Who can tell? These things happen, and we have not the key of them.

Now Philip was undoubtedly responsible, not for Torquil's falling in love with Lady Betty, for he had done that before he even saw the saloon car, but for Lady Betty's falling in love with Torquil, which was more important, and which she might not have done if she had not been made to sit next to him, and to notice that he was quite the best-looking man she ever saw before in her life. But whom the gods would join together, they will bring together in any case, so Philip's responsibility was not very onerous. It did not trouble him, at any rate, either then or later.

But if the transit to London brought Torquil to a place bearing a strong resemblance to Paradise, it was uncompromising Purgatory to Donald MacKenzie. If Miss de la Herne had been a Venus, she would have been loathly in his eyes at that precise moment; and if her conversation had coruscated with the epigrams of two centuries, it would have still bored him to extinction. As both her person and her mind were unvaryingly

commonplace, his feelings may be imagined but not described.

And Blanche? Was she glad to be sitting between her father and Philip? Did the latter's stories of his brother officers, brought out as a sign that he wished to make himself specially agreeable, satisfy all her cravings for human intercourse? Did she never glance across the carriage at her late A.D.C.-in-waiting, and wonder how he was getting on, and read in his face that the answer was badly?

Lady Philippa told Mrs. Gillespie how very much nicer it was to go to Court in the evening than to a Drawing-room in the morning, and how more becoming to ladies of "a certain age," among whom she frankly ranked herself.

Captain Gillespie rode his hobby for the edification of Lord Ewe, and became heated and eloquent as was his wont.

Philip recounted in roars of laughter the subalterns' court-martial held on a youth newly arrived from Sandhurst, and whose chief offence was "well knowing himself to be an ass, and failing to report himself as such on joining."

Torquil and Lady Betty talked voluminously, and for the life of them they could not have told afterwards what it was all about.

And Donald endured martyrdom.

So they journeyed on to London.

At Waterloo they parted : Lord Ewe and his daughters to continue their journey to Yorkshire ; Donald to go to Scotland ; and the rest to remain in London. Philip gave the broadest hints that he wished to be asked to Heribert, and in the fullness of her heart at parting, Lady Blanche was lavish of invitations.

She and Mrs. Gillespie exchanged a kiss, and for two undemonstrative women it said much.

"I shall expect you soon," said Blanche, "for I don't think I can do without you."

"I am jealous of you, Mrs. Gillespie," cried Lady Betty prettily. "But I will forgive you if you will come and stay with us as soon as my sister says."

"I look upon you," said Mrs. Gillespie to Blanche, "almost as a daughter, and I really quite dislike giving you up to your own people."

"How absurd !" smiled Lady Blanche at the other's five years' seniority, and while Lady Betty was inviting Torquil to Heribert, she turned to Donald—

"Though Yorkshire grouse are terribly inferior to Scotch ones, Yorkshire pheasants are not quite to be despised, are they, Mr. MacKenzie ?"

"I am sure," replied Donald with more ardour

in his voice than he knew, "*nothing* that comes from Yorkshire is to be despised."

"I hope you will come and shoot them, then," said Blanche, smiling, and holding out her hand.

It was as well that she was a Spartan woman, for Donald's grip was no joke. Some while afterwards, in examining her crushed fingers, she found that a little thin old-fashioned ring once belonging to Bertram's mother, which she wore on her right hand was snapped in half.

CHAPTER XVI

“**A**ND yet I have only known you five days,” said Lady Betty.

“You will have all eternity to get to know me better in,” returned Torquil, with more ardour than good English.

“But——” gasped Lady Betty.

“Are you afraid?” he asked, smiling.

She smiled back. And the sun shone, though it was November, and beautiful Heribert looked more beautiful than ever before beneath its crimsoned creepers. Because Love has no seasons, and where he is it is always summer.

“You know,” said Lady Betty, smiling still, but gravely, “we are like two foolish children, standing hand-in-hand” (Torquil suited the action to the word), “on the edge of a cliff ready to jump down into the darkness. We believe that underneath us is the sea, and that we shall be able to swim through it to the Isles of the Blessed. But perhaps there is nothing there but the rocks on which mariners make shipwreck.”

She turned and looked at him.

"Are we not very foolish?"

"You may be, though your foolishness is adorable, but I certainly am not."

"Are you so sure?"

"Yes, I am so sure. Don't I look it?"

"You do. But I am afraid you have no grounds."

"But I think I have."

"What do you know of me?"

"That you are the one woman in the world."

"I may turn out quite unlike what you fancy."

"Impossible!"

"You cannot even tell me what my faults are."

"No, because you have none."

"This is trifling, Captain MacLean," said Lady Betty with mock severity. "I have a great many faults. I have noticed them myself, so they must be very noticeable. I will name five, as our vicar says in his sermons. Firstly, I am very fond of my own way, and I have been accustomed to have it all my life."

"Please make it your own way to marry me," implored Torquil.

"Secondly, I am extravagant about dress."

"Well, the end justifies the means."

"I am glad you knew the right answer! If you knew the precious hours I have wasted thinking out this particular frock, you would be quite shocked. Thirdly, I have very little control over my humours. I cannot be good-tempered in a room with a hideous paper on the walls, and a pebble in my shoe inspires me with homicidal thoughts."

"You shall paper your walls any colour you like, and I will always be at hand to take the pebbles out of your shoes," promised he.

"Fourthly, I smoke cigarettes."

"That is, indeed, a serious vice," he said, gravely.

Lady Betty looked up a little frightened.

"Do you really think it a horrid thing to do? Do you disapprove?"

"Very strongly."

She looked down, and her eyelashes threw shadows far down over her cheeks.

"I am sorry," she whispered.

"I would far rather you smoked a pipe," he proceeded, calmly, "it would be much better for you."

Out of shadow into light she flashed at once, throwing back her head and laughing.

"Oh, you are making fun of me! You don't mind at all, really!"

"My precious girl, did you really think I would *mind* anything you did?"

He had been the first of Blanche's Indian acquaintances to accept the invitation to Heriberto, arriving there only thirty-six hours after she did, and he had not been two days in the house before he had proposed to Lady Betty.

"But you know," she said, "though we have lost no time in making up our minds, we shall have to keep the fact a secret for a long time, because of poor Blanche."

"Would Lady Blanche mind?" he asked.

"Perhaps she might not, but it would look rather heartless, wouldn't it?"

He could not see it.

"Were you so very fond of Charlesworth, then?"

"No, I scarcely knew him, and I never thought him good enough for Blanche. But she liked him and was very happy with him, and now she is perfectly broken-hearted."

Torquil looked incredulous.

"Don't look like that. Don't you believe in people being happy though married? This is encouraging for me, upon my word!"

"Of course I do, only it depends on the people."

"Do you know something more about poor Bertram than she has told me?" asked Lady Betty suddenly.

"I don't think," he drily answered, "that your sister will be an inconsolable widow."

"I hope not, I am sure! Especially if *that* is the case. There, you see, is the result of marrying somebody of whom you know nothing, and dashing off thousands of miles from your own family and friends, where even if you are in trouble nobody can get at you to help you."

"Are you applying all this to our case? If so, please don't. I would not dream of asking any woman to follow the drum; I know it is too much to ask of any woman."

"Not of any woman, my dear. To some women it might be a delightful exchange from a dull, humdrum life. Loads of gently born, educated women in this country share a room with half a dozen sisters, have no maid, make their own dresses or do without, and go to one party a year, if that. I don't suppose it strikes a woman who has had that sort of youth that it is uncomfortable to have to change your place of residence every two years; and then not walking

from one big house where everything runs on clockwork like this, to another where everything equally runs on clockwork, as we do. But having actually to house hunt—never having a settled home—oh, misery! How merciful it is that most of them probably don't know how uncomfortable it is!"

"But," interrupted Torquil, "we won't do that. I have left the army, you know. I mean to live in this country—or Scotland."

"You will have to live here," said Betty calmly. "Have you not gathered that I am the eldest son here?"

"Do you mean," he said, with a new light breaking over his face, "that you will—some day, I mean—have this place?"

"This place, also this name. Did you not know that before?" asked Betty quietly, for she was quite used to the idea of this fact enhancing her desirableness as a wife. "I would like you to notice that there are some disadvantages connected with it. You will have, for instance, to be, not the King, but only a Prince Consort."

"No, I never knew it," returned Torquil, looking disturbed. "Please will you allow it to make no difference? If I had known, I would not have had the cheek——"

Betty held up a commanding hand.

"No, don't say it. Or I shall think you don't like being a Prince Consort."

"Heaven knows I didn't aspire to anything so choice!"

"Do you want to change your mind?" she asked imperiously. Her colour was a little high, for she half thought that she caught a regretful accent in his voice, and though she was too proud to hold any man against his will, the thought of parting with him was not pleasant.

But he took both her hands in his and raised first one and then the other to his lips.

"No, I don't, Queen Cophetua!" he said.

* * * * *

A year later Lady Blanche Charlesworth was sitting in her boudoir at Heribert Abbey by the fire, waiting for the first arrivals in a shooting party. She knitted industriously at something mysterious and white-fleeced, counting stitches under the electric lamp on a table at her elbow, and every now and then glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece. She had begun that morning to wear half-mourning, and she was aware in her heart she had long since shed her deep black. The flower which had been beaten down by the rain-storm was turning once more to the sun.

Her thoughts ran chiefly on the expected guests, among whom were Philip de la Herne and Donald MacKenzie; she was aware of a gentle speculation as to how they would think she looked without her weeds. She had been at Eileandoran in August, and Donald was to have been there at the same time, but was prevented to his much disgust, by the peevishness of the officer in command of the dépôt, who thought proper to stop his leave at the last moment. Thus she had not seen him for a year, though he had written to her faithfully every week.

She would not have been a woman if this had not impressed her, and if she could have helped the wonder how he would comport himself on seeing her again.

She looked at herself in the glass critically, and wondered if she looked more than twenty-three years. Her thoughts dwelt the more on Donald because it seemed to her that she had no longer any place in her home. A woman who has had a house of her own, even if it have been only a thatched bungalow in India, cannot easily sink back into being the inmate of another person's establishment. It was Lady Betty who had always been the hostess at Heribert. While she was herself unmarried, Blanche had not felt this; but now as Betty's marriage, which had taken

place seven months before, did not affect the position, it seemed to do away with the younger sister's niche in the household.

Lord Ewe did not particularly need a younger daughter when the elder and her husband were the children of his right hand. He was so absorbed in his son-in-law's career—he was to stand for Parliament at the next election, and they were busy “nursing” the constituency—that it did not occur to him to notice his widowed daughter was very lonely.

Torquil and Betty were all in all to each other, so that her heart tightened at the thought of them; not from jealousy; she was far too sweet and unselfish a woman to suffer from that ugly passion, but because it is dreary when one is out in the cold to look through the window and see other people sitting round a fire.

They were all, she felt and knew, as fond of her as ever, but she was not necessary to them, and she longed to be necessary again as she had dreamt of being during the golden days of her marriage.

There are times in all our lives when we seem to be cut loose from our old-accustomed moorings; when the path behind us seems to close up; and when the life we used to lead seems to have exhausted all its possibilities. Such a time was upon Lady Blanche now. She had left her

niche in the home life when she married, and she found that she could not step back into it.

As she sat thinking on these things, she heard wheels, for her boudoir was over the front door, facing the big central staircase which led into the hall below. She heard voices, and waited till they ceased. Then she came down the softly-carpeted stairs, across the ringing black and white pavement of the hall, and through the corridor, which was on the other side of the house from the terrace. All the living-rooms opened out into this corridor, which ended in another staircase. The drawing-room was the last door at the foot of these second stairs, and Lady Blanche reached it just as the butler, after announcing the guests, was closing it behind him and coming away.

The drawing-room was very brightly lighted, and there were more people in it than she had encountered at once for more than a year. The old feeling of shyness came over her. She—a woman, a widow of twenty-three—felt like a girl just “out,” coming into her first house-party of strangers.

Everybody seemed to be talking at once with the buzzing effect of unanimous conversation. The lights were all focussed on a tea table, at

which stood Lady Betty, laughing, talking, and pouring out tea all at once in the joyous, animated manner which her sister never could see without marvelling at. Lord Ewe was on the hearthrug near the blazing fire, and by him, overtopping him as the Scotch fir does the oak, was Donald MacKenzie.

* * * * *

Dinner was over. Lady Blanche had been down with an old friend of her father's, whose very young daughter sat immediately opposite with Donald. Blanche had watched her, smiling at her self-possession. It was the girl's genuine first party, but she showed no signs of being aware of it, looking about her, full of little airs of self-importance, adjusting her frills, playing with her bangles—even, Blanche thought, stooping over the silver plates to admire her own reflection on their shining surface.

"Oh dear, Lady Betty, what a dreadfully dull young man you sent me down with!" she cried, as the ladies clustered round the drawing-room fire.

The Duchess of Pimlico, a young woman married to a man twenty years her senior, looked round as she stood with her finger-tips lightly resting on the mantelpiece.

"Chit!" she remarked to Blanche. "When I was eighteen, I was grateful if I was sent in to dinner with a man at all!"

"How times change!" remarked another young married woman. "I never remember thinking a *parti* dull."

The young lady was not snubbed. She came up to Blanche even unconscious that a snub had been attempted.

"Don't you think him deadly?" she asked in confidentially low tones.

Blanche smiled. Did she?

"I only hope," went on the girl, "that he won't want to talk to me all the evening. He might, you know, if he does not know anybody else, and feels shy."

"Don't alarm yourself unnecessarily," said Lady Blanche, smiling. "Donald knows all of us better than you, and he is not in the least shy."

It did not strike her till her sentence was finished that she had called him unconsciously by his Christian name.

"What a mercy! for I really don't care much for boys," replied the girl, and Blanche laughed outright.

When the men came in, it appeared that everybody could play bridge except the Duke of

Pimlico, who would not, and the girl. Two tables were made up, and Blanche and Donald cut out.

"I do not care to play to-night, anyway," remarked Blanche. A moment later, she turned to Donald and said: "Won't you play a game of billiards with Miss Burgoyne while you are waiting?"

"I would rather play one with you," returned Donald promptly.

"I would," said Blanche, glancing at the bridge players, already absorbed in the question of making trumps, "only I feel she ought to be amused——"

"She's quite happy," cut in Donald; and indeed the young lady looked it, perched smilingly on the arm of her father's chair. "Come!"

The billiard-room opened out into the same wide corridor as the drawing-room. Lady Blanche walked out of the room and down the strip of red velvet pile carpet in the middle of the corridor with her white dress billowing after her. An unrest and uncertainty that had haunted her during dinner left her. This, then, was what she wanted, she thought with a smile to herself, to be left alone with Donald.

"And what do you think of Eileandoran?" he asked, choosing himself a cue.

•

"I hope you will think my home half as beautiful."

"I cannot promise to do that," returned the loyal Donald, "for I have never seen anything yet that I thought compared with Eileandoran. Wasn't it sickening my leave being stopped, so that I could not be there to show it to you? Gillespie would say it's a way they have in the army. Have you seen the Gillespies lately, by the way?"

"Not since they were here in October."

"Are they very happy?"

"Perfectly, I believe. They have got an old Tudor house with a ravishing garden in the apple-blossom country, and all the animals and machines they pined for. I am their little girl's godmother; she is to be the beauty of her year."

"And your sister has made a happy man of MacLean?"

"I think it is a great success. Betty is perfectly satisfied," said Blanche demurely. "Torquil is going to be Secretary of State for War some day, he says, as a just revenge."

Donald made three cannons running.

"Some people make a very good business of marriage, don't they?" he remarked, missing an easy opportunity for putting the red down.

"I don't think," said Blanche, in a low voice,

"that it is always people's own fault if they make a bad business of it."

Donald scowled portentously at his ball, and blamed himself inwardly for want of tact. The silence grew electric.

"I believe it will be a very good shoot to-morrow," remarked Blanche nervously.

Donald looked up from his stroke.

"And what did you think of my father?" he said conversationally. "Isn't he an ideal old Highland chieftain?"

"Not quite so uncivilised, is he?" smiled back Blanche from the other side of the table.

"Is civilisation such a very good thing? Were not people more straightforward and to the point in the old days?"

"I don't think that they were more so than you are now," said Blanche, laughing.

"Thank you for your testimony to my truth of character. And thank you, too, for laughing. I like to hear you laugh," said Donald, with a softening voice.

"Torquil told me you disapproved of women who laughed," she answered lightly.

"I will punch his head for betraying my sacred confidence."

"Please don't!" she cried. "Betty would never forgive me. And, oh, please, I don't want

to have the murder of my sister's husband on my soul."

"Very well. But what else did he say? Did he infer that I meant you by what I said?" Donald's voice was very suspicious. "Because if he did, nothing shall save him."

"No, no, indeed he didn't."

"You are quite sure?"

"Indeed you can trust me. He said it quite *à propos de bottes*. It was only your saying something about laughing that reminded me of it. You did say it, then?"

He was in the middle of a break, and waited till it was finished before he answered.

"I didn't mean it for you. I like to hear you laugh," he said, coming round to her side of the table. "I should like you always to laugh and—and be happy."

There was something compelling in his gaze. She threw a glance up at him, and found him standing near looking at her so fixedly that she dropped her eyes as if dazzled. A dozen answers sprang to her lips, but she made none of them, for it seemed she could say nothing that would not lead up pointedly to the subject which was in both their minds, or as pointedly turn it away. And yet, was her second thought, why not lead up to it? for she knew quite well what was going

to be the end. But she found that she could not say anything, and a girlish blush was dyeing her cheeks up to the temples.

She leant over the table, and aimed very wildly at her ball.

"Take care! You won't hit the red that way," said Donald at her elbow. "May I show you?"

He laid his left hand on hers, which supported the cue, and his right on the cue, just behind hers. Her arm lay along his, and the cloudy glory of her hair was close to his shoulder. As he made the stroke for her, she felt the whole movement thrill through her frame. Her heart began to beat as a gambler's does when his last *pièce* is on the table, and the roulette wheel is slowing down beneath the spinning ball. She crouched back against the table, and tried gently to draw her hand away from his. But as she did so his other hand left the cue for her waist, and raised her up to look him face to face.

He said nothing, but his eyes asked a plain question, and hers looked quietly up, and gave their answer. Then he kissed her.

It was characteristic of him, that instead of bending down to her, he should have lifted her clean off her feet, tall woman as she was, until her lips were on a level with his.

When he set her down, she sighed sharply, longing for the old confidence. Love to her was now so wrought with fear. She felt that she had such heart's riches to bestow; and what if they were once more to be wasted? She did not think she could bear a second disillusionment.

Yet she gambled, like all her foremothers before her, staking her all on a chance, and willing so to stake as long as Fortune allowed.

She sat on the soft leather cushion of the low fender stool before the fire, and gloried as a woman always does in the knowledge that her lover is a strong man. When he spoke to her, she looked at him with new eyes, and wondered how it was that she had not remembered how clean-cut was the shape of his head, and how decisive the lines in his features like a strong drawing. If he, too, proved a broken reed, then, indeed, character could have no power to imprint itself on the outer man.

"But I am afraid!" she whispered tremulously.
"I am afraid!"

He smiled protectingly.

"Afraid of what?"

"Of you—but chiefly of myself."

"Then don't be any more. You don't think me dangerous? Not to anyone I love, like you."

"I do," she said seriously. "I think you very dangerous indeed, because I cannot help loving you."

He put his arm round her and kissed her again.

"Thank you, dear," he said simply. "Then don't worry about anything else. If we love each other, what is there to be afraid of? and I love you more than anything on earth."

"More than Eileandoran?" she asked with a smile.

"Yes, for I want to give you Eileandoran."

And she, knowing how much this meant, was touched to the quick. But she said teasingly: "But what will your father say to that?"

"He will say he could not have found a sweeter or more beautiful daughter-in-law if he'd looked for one for a hundred years."

"He would be going much too fast, for you have not asked me to marry you yet."

"Yes, I have," retorted Donald boldly, "and you have said Yes."

"Have I?" she said in a low voice, turning away with her hands pressed together, "have I really?"

"Yes, and what's more, I'm not going to let you go back on it." He returned and took her into his arms again, as one of his cateran ances-

tors might have seized a captive woman of some conquered clan.

And she thought all the time of the fearful fascination of gambling, while her whole soul seemed to concentrate itself in the passionate hope that she had at last found her true mate, and was not again chasing a shadow.

Then, suddenly, she straightened herself as a bent hazel tree might spring up into erectness.

"The regiment!" she exclaimed. "The army! You will have to go back to India next year."

"Not a bit of it," he declared. "Don't you remember Gillespie's advice to me? There will be no room for the army in my life when it is yours."

"I could never bear to go to India again," she said. "I suffered far too much there. I'll tell you about it some day—but I do not like the idea of ruining your career."

He laughed confidently.

"No fear. My career lies nearer home than India. I never meant to soldier all my life. Some day," he added with the most *naïve* simplicity, "we will send one of our younger sons into the army—but not, I think, into my regiment, unless it is vastly improved."

She thought it her duty to be still dissatisfied.

"Are you not rather young to make up your

mind so decisively all of a sudden?" she asked tentatively.

"We MacKenzies all grow up soon," he returned confidently. "I know my own mind about *everything*," glancing at her meaningly, "I always have."

"I am glad," she said pensively, "because perhaps you will always make up mine for me."

"I will do that once and for all," he whispered with his lips almost on hers. "It shall be always the same as mine."

THE END

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